

James
War and Peace: Learning to Deal with Conflict, Part 5
James 4:1-10
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I was thinking this last week that it's been twenty-two years since my Dad passed away. He's been in glory with our Lord. I was reminded of that, as I was thinking back on some of the years when I was growing up. I have many fond memories of times with my Dad, as well as with my Dad and brothers together. I particularly remember our enjoying, as a family, sporting events together. One of the memories that remains vivid in my mind is sitting in our tiny little living room in Mobile, Alabama, together as a group of guys (I have four brothers) and my Dad and I listening to a radio announcer call blow by blow the fights of the great Muhammad Ali. As a kid, I was fascinated by this character because it was the first time I'd ever had heard anyone who was so overtly self-promoting. You know, "I am the Greatest!" and his little poem, "Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee, his hands can't hit what his eyes can't see." He was never known for his humility, only for his boxing.

Fact, one story that was often told (I don't know if it's true, or not); but supposedly, Ali was on an aircraft, flying to one of his engagements. And during the flight, the aircraft hit some bad weather and some fairly significant turbulence. The passengers, of course, were immediately instructed to fasten their seatbelts by the captain. And everyone complied, but Ali. And the flight attendant recognized that he had not, and came over to him and politely asked that he comply with the captain's command to fasten his seatbelt; to which Ali replied, I should say, with these classic words: "Superman don't need no seatbelt." Well, the flight attendant, not to be outdone, and thinking quickly on her feet, said, "Yeah, and Superman don't need no airplane, either." For Ali, pride was, not only a part of his character, but it was also a carefully staged public persona. And frankly, it was often very funny. His interchanges with Howard Cosell cannot be forgotten.

The reason I bring Ali up is because his antics were part of, what I believe, was a larger societal shift that was happening. If you were alive before Muhammad Ali, you'll remember that there was a general expectation that you would not overtly promote yourself. In fact, if you were a respectable member of society, you were supposed to, at least, fain humility. Now understand that sinners have always been sinners. They've always been filled with pride. But there was at

least a veneer of humility that respectable members of society were supposed to have in their interactions with others. That is, certainly, no longer true. And I think Ali wasn't so much the cause of it, as he was part of a huge societal shift that occurred. You saw it beginning, even in the '70's. Some of you remember G. Gordon Liddy, the Watergate conspirator, when he was released from prison, uttered these words that made all the news: "I have found within myself all I need and all I ever shall need. I am a man of great faith. But my faith is in George Gordon Liddy. I have never failed me."

But of course, if you fast forward to more recent times, this has only gathered steam. Several years ago (you may have seen it or read about it). MTV did a special on "The Seven Deadly Sins," sort of seeing what the state of sin was in the culture. And the sin, as you might suspect, that took the biggest hit from contemporary culture was pride. For example, popular musician "Iced Tea" said, "Pride is mandatory. That's one of the problems of the inner city. Kids don't have enough pride. I got into a gang because of pride." And of course, you see where it's gotten him. Then there was actress Kirsti Alley, who said, "I don't think pride is a sin. And I think some idiot made that up." And of course, we all long for the day when a microphone is stuck in front of a sports figure, that he said, "Hi Mom." Not anymore. Stick a microphone in front of any sports figure today, and you will get an endless stream of verbiage, all self-promoting. To our self-esteem, drunk culture, pride has become a friend of the soul, not its enemy.

But the truth is, according to Scripture and according to James, as we'll see this morning, pride is the soul's greatest enemy, because it isolates us both from the grace of God and from the God of grace. I invite you to turn again with me to James 4 James 4. I'd planned to finish this passage this morning. But when I finished writing up all of my notes, it appeared to be too much material for this morning. And so, I let my wife read it. And she urged me to take it easy on you and to divide it in two. "No person," she said, "could absorb everything I'd planned to say." So, this morning, we're going to look at the proverb that occurs in the heart of this text. And Lord willing, next Sunday morning we'll finish it together. Let me read it to you again, and remind you of the flow of James' thought. James 4:1,

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have, *so* you commit murder. You're envious and cannot obtain, *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask, and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward

God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose, “He jealously desires the Spirit, which He has made to dwell in us?” But He gives a greater grace. Therefore, *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” Submit, therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

As we’ve discovered, over the last number of weeks in this wonderful paragraph, James outlines for us three practical steps for dealing with the sinful conflict that’s so much a part of our lives. He introduces his topic in the first verse with quarrels and conflicts. Now, we’ve learned that these practical steps enable us to comprehend the truth about ourselves and our condition, as well as about the solution. Let me remind you of where we’ve come, so far.

The first practical step that we noted is in verses 1 - 3. And that is: We have to identify the true source of conflict. When you look at verses 1 - 3, we discover in verse 1, and again in verse 3, that the real source of the conflict is not the conflict issue. It isn’t what we’re arguing about. It isn’t the other person. Instead, it is our “pleasures,” (verse 1 and verse 3). That is, it’s the cravings of our sinful heart for what will bring them satisfaction. And when we can’t get them, when someone else stands in our way, conflict erupts.

Secondly, we discovered that if we’re going to deal with the sinful conflict in our lives, (in verses 4 and 5), we must magnify the real sin behind conflict. You see, the real sin is much deeper and much darker than we could ever have imagined. James tells us that, ultimately, if we’re locked into a pattern of quarreling and arguing, the real sin that lies behind it is “spiritual adultery.” And he took us on a journey to help us see how he got there. Essentially, if I’m quarreling and arguing, as a pattern of life, it’s because I love pleasure; and if I love pleasure, I’m a friend of the world and an enemy of God; and I’m committing spiritual adultery against God. In other words, I love the stuff and pleasures, sinful pleasures of the world too much, and I love God too little. That’s the real sin that lies behind conflict.

Now those are the first five verses. It’s important that you understand the logical connection between verses 1 - 5 and verses 6 - 10. Verses 1 - 5 is the diagnosis of the problem. You go to a doctor. It’s important for him to correctly diagnose the problem; because if he doesn’t, he can’t

give you the proper treatment. And so, verses 1 - 5 is the diagnosis. It's understanding the true nature of the problem that goes on with quarreling and arguing. And that's crucial if we're going to deal with the problem at a heart level, as opposed to simply trying to cut off the fruit or the branches. We deal with the root and not the fruit. So, verses 1 - 5 is a diagnosis.

When you come to verses 6 - 10, we come to the prescription or to the treatment, or to the solution to conflict. It's important that you understand what I have come to grasp from this text. And that is: that although James writes verses 6 - 10 as the very specific solution to those who are locked in a pattern of arguing and quarreling, the principles in verses 6 - 10 are not confined merely to arguing and quarreling. They're not confined to a particular sin. But instead, the principles of verses 6 - 10 are far-reaching both in their implications and in their application. Whatever sin or sins you find yourself locked in a battle with, this morning, here is the solution. It may be arguing and quarreling. But it may not be. Whatever it is, I can promise you that verses 6 - 10 give you the solution. They give you the path home. Here is how to get from wherever your sin has taken you back to God. So, the third practical step that we discover for dealing with sinful conflict, and for that matter, with any other sin is (in verses 6 - 10): identify the right solution.

As we saw last week, the solution is contained in one simple word: the word, "grace". Whatever sin it is that we find ourselves engaged with; whatever sin it is that we find ourselves having given in to, the solution comes to us from God in a single word. It's the word "grace." Notice in verse 6, he explains that reality in five very pregnant words: "But he gives greater grace." "But," that is, in contrast to our sin; "God," that is, it's his nature. It's because of who he is, to be gracious. "Gives," literally, "is constantly giving." "Greater," that is, greater than our sin, and even greater than his wrath against sin, Grace. And as we saw last time, grace is the reality that God has a positive disposition and attitude toward us, even though we have earned exactly the opposite. We have earned His eternal wrath. He treats us as the special objects of His favor.

You see, whatever your sinful struggle may be, (And by the way, each of us has our own set of sins that will always be our propensity: part of the package we inherited from our parents), whether it's arguing and fighting, as here in James 4, living for pleasure, or whether it's pride or anger or bitterness or selfishness or fear or worry or you fill in the blank: whatever your list may be. Whether your struggle falls, as the apostle John puts it, more into the category of the lust of the flesh; or whether your sin falls more into the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, regardless. Whatever it is, your only hope and my only hope is the grace of our God. That is "the solution". God has at His disposal the grace of forgiveness, which we desperately need if we find ourselves

locked into sin. The grace of forgiveness God bestows upon us the favor of forgiving us for offending Him and offending His just and Holy character and violating His law.

We not only need the grace of forgiveness, however. We also need the grace of sanctification. You see, grace will not only forgive you; and grace will not only restore you to full fellowship with God; but it will also empower you to obey God's Word consistently and to grow in holiness. Now, we know that we can't earn that grace. We know that we can't require God, as it were, to dispense it to us. As we saw last week, God said to Moses, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." This is God's sovereign opportunity. It's His sovereign decision.

So, here's the key question. How can we, who so desperately need grace, apply to God to give us what we can never earn, and what He sovereignly bestows, solely according to His own choice? How? Well, James tells us how. You see, although grace can never be earned, God has set a condition, a prerequisite that must be met before He bestows grace. There is one condition, one qualification for receiving grace. And it is humility, humility. It's being willing to truly humble yourself before God. You see, God always bestows grace on true humility, on the one who most clearly understands the severity of, and the hopelessness of his condition before God.

Now there are many examples of this in both the Old and the New Testaments. But James, under the genius and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, chooses a Proverb: Proverbs 3:34. Notice he quotes it in verse 6 of chapter 4. "Therefore, it says," (speaking of the Scripture). "Therefore it says." You don't have to guess how God dispenses grace. You don't have to wonder whether or not this is true. James says, "This is what the Scripture says." This is God's self-revelation of how He responds to us, and on what basis He dispenses grace. "Therefore, it says, 'God is opposed to the proud; but gives grace to the humble.'" There is the condition on which God bestows His grace, presented to us in the form of a timeless proverb. And it's one I would urge you to commit to memory. Now listen carefully: since grace is necessary for salvation, (but not just salvation; it's also necessary for forgiveness in our ongoing relationship to God; it's necessary for sanctification; for facing trials in a way that honors God; Grace is necessary for serving God adequately; and for everything in our Christian lives). I am convinced that there is nothing more foundational than understanding what God says here because God says, "You need grace! It's how you deal with sin, both in forgiveness and in growing out of that sin. And I dispense it on the basis of this revelation." This is one of those timeless, inviolable laws of the moral universe. I don't care who you are, God will not show partiality to you. He will not give you an exemption, a "Get Out of Jail Free" card from this timeless principle. Let's think about it together.

The first half, of course, describes the negative side: “God is opposed to the proud.” Now, what does it mean to be proud? The word, “proud” literally means (the Greek word) literally means “to show oneself above others”. It is to regard yourself as the standard of excellence, and look down on everyone else. It is a kind of haughty superiority that sees yourself as the standard, and you measure everybody else against that standard. And guess what? No one ever measures up. No one’s ever as good as you are. That’s what it means to be proud. Now, toward God, pride tends to demonstrate itself in a variety of ways, which we’ll talk about in just a few minutes. But it’s important for you to understand the gravity of this sin. Most of us have never heard someone confronted about pride. Most of us have never heard the seriousness of this sin. It’s one we overlook. It’s part of who we are. It’s part of the culture.

But listen: pride was the very first sin in God’s universe. It began in the heart of one that’s called “The Covering Cherub;” the most important figure next to God in heaven; probably the prime minister of heaven. And in his heart, he began to take pride in the beauty that God had given him in creation. He began to take pride in the position that he’d received. And he began to think that he deserved a higher position, even one equal to, or over God, Himself. But it was also part (pride was) of the very first human sin. Adam and Eve concluded that they knew better than God; better than His revelation; better than His purposes for them. Some theologians would even say that pride was part of the essence, or was the essence of the first sin. And to the sons of Adam, to all of us, it comes very naturally. In fact, Paul, in Romans 1, when he begins the indictment of the human race, he gets to verse 30. As he’s listing all the sins that we’re guilty of, he lists this very word. It’s translated there as “arrogant” in Romans 1:30. The same word occurs in 2 Timothy 3:2, where Paul tells Timothy that “in the last days, savage times will come and men will be arrogant.” They will see themselves above others.

Jonathan Edwards writes of this sin: “Pride is the worst viper in the heart. It is the first sin that ever entered the universe.” (Listen to this): “It lies lowest of all in the foundation of the whole building of sin. It is the most secret, deceitful, and unsearchable in its ways of working of any lust, whatever. It is ready to mix with everything. And nothing is so hateful to God, contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, or of so dangerous consequence. There is no one sin that does so much let the devil into the hearts of the saints, and expose them to his delusions.” Did you notice that Edwards said, “Pride is deceitful?” It’s deceitful. So we don’t recognize it.

CNN founder, Ted Turner once remarked, “If only I had a little humility, I would be perfect.” Pride can enable us to write a book entitled, *The Ten Most Humble People in the World and How I Taught the Other Nine*. It’s deceitful!

C. J. Mehaney, in his excellent little book on humility, which we carry in our bookstore, said this: “Though it shows up in different forms and to differing degrees, it affects us all. The real issue here is not, “If pride exists in your heart;” it’s “Where and how pride is being expressed in your life.” Scripture shows us that pride is strongly and dangerously rooted in all our lives far more than most of us care to admit, or even think about.”

You see, pride expresses itself in an infinite variety of ways. Here are just a few. Here’s how pride can show itself. You can be proud of your accomplishments and your wealth. Southlake and Dallas and surrounding areas, there’re lots of people walking around proud of their accomplishments and wealth. In Daniel 4:30, as Nebuchadnezzar reflected, he said this, “Is this not Babylon, the great, which I, myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power, and for the glory of my majesty?” There’re no Nebuchadnezzar’s around, in terms of greatness. But there’re plenty of Nebuchadnezzars around, in terms of attitude.

You could be proud of your position and your status. In Matthew 23, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, and He says, “They love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called ‘Rabbi’ by men.” You can love position and status, even religious position and status.

You could take pride in your spiritual activities. Again, in Matthew 23:5, speaking of the Pharisees, Jesus says, “They do all their deeds to be noticed by men.” And then He lists two: They broaden their phylacteries. This was a misunderstanding of the command to bind the Word of God to your forehead and to your heart. They took it literally. But they also widened, or excuse me, lengthened their tassels the tassels of their garments. That was commanded by God. But they just made them bigger than God required, so that everybody would know how spiritual they really were. You can take pride in your spiritual activities, even those commanded by God.

You can take pride in your spiritual gifts, responsibilities, and privileges. In Romans 12:3 Paul warns us about this. He says, “Through the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” You can be proud of the gifts God has given you.

You can be proud of knowledge. First Corinthians 8:1: “Knowledge makes arrogant,” that is, without love being mixed with it.

You can be proud of your theological prowess, of your biblical knowledge. You can be proud of your convictions, those things that go beyond the Scripture, themselves. First Corinthians 4:6, Paul says, “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that you may learn (the meaning of the saying) ‘Not beyond what has been written.’” “Stick with the Scripture,” he says. Why? “So that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.”

When you go beyond Scripture, when you go beyond what has been written; you begin to be puffed up and proud. “Look how spiritual I am.” By the way, the next verse in 1 Corinthians 4 answers all human pride. Listen to what Paul says: “... What do you have that you did not receive?” I asked myself that, this morning. I ask you that, this morning. “What do you have that you haven’t received?” Paul says, “and if you did receive it, why do you boast, as if you’d not received it?”

Pride is so insidious, that it can also manifest itself toward God. Let me give you just a few of the ways it manifests itself toward God. We can be so proud, that we deny God’s existence. Psalm 10:4, “The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek God. All his thoughts are ‘There is no God.’” You meet an atheist, what you discover is someone who is so proud that he refuses to acknowledge there is another authority in the world to whom he needs to give account.

We can also be so proud that we disobey the Word of God. In that great chapter 9 of Nehemiah, where Nehemiah pours out his confession and the confession of his people before the Lord (in verse 16), he says, “But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly.” How did they act arrogantly? “They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments.” Then he goes on to verse 29 of the same chapter. He says, “And you admonished them, in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet, they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments, but sinned against Your ordinances. They turned a stubborn shoulder, and stiffened their neck and would not listen.” If you understand what the Scriptures teach about some issue in your life, and you are standing, stubbornly refusing to do what the Scripture says, it’s a demonstration of your pride before God.

A third way our pride can manifest itself toward God is, we can simply refuse to give God glory and thanks for what He does. There’s a very interesting verse in 2 Chronicles. You remember, of course, King Hezekiah. He was told he was going to die. He poured out his heart, and cried out that God would give him more life. And God responded, and did. But in 2 Chronicles

32:25, we read this: “Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received.” Why? “Because his heart was proud.” Listen. An unthankful heart is a proud heart, because if we’re unthankful, it means we think we deserve it. We got what we deserve so why do I extend thanks for that?

A fourth way that our pride demonstrates itself toward God, (and I think the way that it demonstrates itself most frequently among Christians) is the displaying of an independent, self-sufficient spirit. “I can handle it on my own.” In Hosea 13:5, God says this to the people of Israel. He says, “I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought.” Then He says, “As they had their pasture, they became satisfied; and being satisfied, their heart became proud. Therefore, they forgot Me!” They became utterly self-sufficient, assuming that they were capable, now that God had gotten them there, of caring for themselves. That’s pride! And when you and I live our lives independent of God, independent of His help, independent of acknowledging the need for His help, then we are proud.

Let me just ask you: Are you characterized by any of those attitudes? Do you see yourself as a cut above others? Do you measure everybody else against yourself, and they always come up short? Are you independent in your relationship with God, self-sufficient?

Well, what is God’s perspective about pride? Proverbs 16:5, “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Assuredly, He will not be unpunished.” That, by the way, is exactly what James is saying. Turn back. Look again at James 4:6 He says, “God is opposed to the proud.” The word, “opposed” is a very interesting Greek word. It’s a military term, actually. It means “to station,” or “arrange against.” This word vividly describes God continuously taking up arms against, or doing battle with the proud person.

We’ve all seen images on television this week of the war between Israel and Hezbollah. Now, whether you agree or disagree with Israel’s decision, no one doubts that Israel currently is up to its neck in a military offensive. Its stated goal is to reduce the capacity of Hezbollah to attack the northern towns in Israel with impunity. I want you, for a moment, to think of those images that you’ve seen, perhaps on the newspaper, perhaps on television: those terrible images of bombs and tanks and artillery, pounding Hezbollah positions in southern Lebanon.

What I want you to realize is: that is the meaning behind this Greek word, “opposed.” God has taken up the offensive. He is on a military offensive. He is launching all of His artillery against the proud heart. This is a recurring theme in Scripture. Psalm 18:27: “You save an afflicted people, but haughty eyes you abase.” Psalm 138:6, “Though the Lord is exalted, He regards the

lowly; but the haughty He knows from afar.” Daniel 4:37, Nebuchadnezzar says, “I praise, exalt and honor the king of heaven, for He is able to humble those who walk in pride.”

You know, there are many illustrations of God showing His opposition to the proud in Scripture. But I don't think any is more poignant than one I discovered as a new Christian. I want you to turn with me to 2 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles 26. As a new believer, I was reading through this portion and was shocked, really, by what I found. Second Chronicles 26:1: “And all the people of Judah took Uzzaiah, who was 16 years old, and made him king in the place of his father, Amaziah. He built Eloth, and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers. Uzzaiah was 16 years old when he became king. And he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem.” Verse 4, “He did right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father, Amaziah had done. He continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding to the vision of God. And as long as he sought the Lord, God prospered him.” And verse 6 and following details how God prospered this king, Uzzaiah.

But I want you to look at verse 16. The tone changes. But when Uzzaiah became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly. And he was unfaithful to the Lord, his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.” (Understand, here, now, that he's not allowed by God's law to take this role upon himself. But after the death of his mentor, Zechariah, he decides that he is more than capable of filling the role that Zechariah had left. And so, he goes to offer incense.)

Verse 17, “Then Azariah, the priest, entered after him, and with him, eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. They opposed Uzzaiah, the king and said to him, ‘It is not for you, Uzzaiah, to burn incense to the Lord; but for the priests, the sons of Aaron.’ (Those are the ones God chose.) ‘Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful, and will have no honor from the Lord God.’ But Uzzaiah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged!

And while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the altar of incense. Azariah, the chief priest, and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there. And he, himself also hastened to get out; because Yahweh had smitten him. King Uzzaiah was a leper to the day of his death. And he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.” Here, you see, in vivid detail an illustration of God opposing the proud. In fact, this may be a surprise to you. But God, Himself, says that part of His, (if I could say it respectfully), His job description as God, is to humble the proud.

Look at Job where I want you to turn, Job 40. You remember, of course, that all of Job's friends had been speaking most of the book. And now God, in chapter 40, speaks. And he cuts through all the fog left by Job's friends. In verse 1, "The Lord said to Job, 'Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it.' He says, "Are you really going to reprove Me? Are you really going to find fault with Me?"

Job, in verses 3 - 5, says, "Oh, I shouldn't a done that. I shouldn't be talking like this. I'm not going to answer. I'm not going to say anything more."

But God's not done talking, verse 6: "The Lord answered Job out of the storm and said, 'Gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. Will you really annul my judgment? Will you condemn Me, that you may be justified?'" And then in verse 9, He begins to talk about what it's like to be God. He says, "Fine, Job, you want to be God? Then here's what you'll need to do." "Do you have an arm like God? Can you thunder with a voice like His? Adorn yourself with eminence and dignity. And clothe yourself with honor and majesty." Now watch verse 11. "Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud, and make him low. Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him." God says, "This is part of what it is to be God; because I am God, I know that the glory belongs to Me alone."

Now, turn back to James 4. What I want you to see is that in the context of James 4, the "proud" are not only those who see themselves above others, who live with an independent spirit. But the "proud," here, are those who engage in a pattern of arguing and fighting, who are pursuing their own cravings, and are thereby unfaithful to God. But here's the key issue: Yet, they still refuse to acknowledge their sin. They refuse to do what God urges us to do in verses 7 - 10. They refuse to humble themselves and to repent. Therefore, James says, they're not going to receive God's grace. Now folks, the same is true for you and for me, whatever our sinful propensities may be. If we stubbornly hold on to our sin, if we refuse to turn from it, if we refuse to turn back to God; we are proving ourselves to be proud. And God will put Himself in active opposition to us. This is how pride thinks.

John Milton, in his epic poem, "Paradise Lost," records a conversation that Satan has in hell with those fallen angels that followed him. After God has cast them out of heaven, they find themselves in hell, deciding what their strategy's going to be. And Satan, according to Milton, says this to these fallen angels, in these immortal words: "Tis better to rule in hell than to serve in heaven." That is the expression of pride. That is the unvoiced, or even unthought view of the proud heart. And it invites God's opposition.

How is it that God opposes the proud? What are the weapons God uses against us when we stand resolute in our pride? Well, we don't know all the weapons. God has an infinite variety at His disposal. In Daniel 4:37, Nebuchadnezzar just says, "He is able to humble those who walk in pride." That doesn't mean God's going to do to us what He did to Nebuchadnezzar. But what it does mean is that God has just the right weapon for everyone who is proud. Charles Spurgeon writes,

"See Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty builder of Babylon, creeping on the earth, devouring grass like oxen until his nails had grown like a bird's claws, and his hair like eagles' feathers. Pride made the boaster a beast, as once before He'd made an angel a devil. God hates high looks; and never fails to bring them down. All the arrows of God are aimed at proud hearts."

Listen, if you and I are ignoring the pride in our hearts, if we are allowing it to grow undisturbed; then we have declared war against God. Or more importantly, God has declared war against us. We are defending our pride, then we are killing God's grace. "God is opposed to the proud."

But notice the second line: "He gives grace to the humble." Those words, of course, are very much like the words we looked at in detail last week. So, we don't need to review all that we said then. Just notice that the key word, there, is the word "grace". It's everything we need as believers. And James literally says that God is "giving grace". This is how God consistently acts. This is His constant practice. James says, "God gives grace...." He consistently treats with favor; He is good to; He befriends the humble. Now, it's vital that you understand, or I should say, that you don't misunderstand the relationship between "grace" and "humility."

Don't, for a moment, think that we earn God's grace by our humility. Grace, by definition, isn't deserved, and can't be earned. We will. We do deserve, I should say, God's wrath. And we will always deserve His wrath, whether we humble ourselves before Him, or not. No one deserves, or ever deserves His grace. But God has sovereignly determined to give grace only to those who humble themselves before Him.

As Douglas Moo puts it, "God's gift of sustaining grace is enjoyed only by those willing to admit their need and accept His gift." Imagine, for a moment, that a wealthy philanthropist had decided to give a million dollars to a family; and that the only qualifications were that they be in abject poverty and that their total indebtedness was at least a hundred thousand dollars. Perhaps as many as a million families would make application for the money. All are equally in

impossible debt. None of the families is any more deserving than another. But the wealthy man decides to give his money to the family who can best understand the depth and severity of their need. That is how our God always works. He extends His grace to the one who humbles himself enough to see his true problem.

Psalm let me show you several texts that make this point. Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted. He saves those who are crushed in spirit.” The writer, Isaiah often makes this point, as well. Isaiah 57:15. He says, “For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” Isaiah 66:2 God says, “To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

And then you come to the New Testament and the story doesn’t change. Jesus, in His first major sermon, the sermon on the Mount, as He lays out the kingdom principles, says to His disciples the very first beatitude: “Blessed are the” What? “Poor in spirit:” the beggars in spirit, who are in spirit what a literal beggar is, recognizing they have nothing, but to cry out for someone else to intervene.

Jesus puts it in these words in Luke 5. Luke 5:30. The Pharisees and Scribes were grumbling that He was eating with tax collectors and sinners. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.’” Martin Luther, in commenting on that, put it this way. Listen carefully. He says, “It is God’s nature to make something out of nothing. That is why He cannot make anything out of him who is not yet ‘nothing.’” It’s only when we come to recognize ourselves as nothing that God is ready to intervene.

Of course, the most beautiful illustration of what it means to come humbly and contritely before God comes in a story our Lord told in Luke 18. You remember He talked about these two men who “went up to the temple to pray: and one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector.” And He says, “The tax collector stood some distance away, was unwilling to lift his eyes to heaven, but was beating his chest, saying, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner!’” That is the opposite of a proud heart. And it’s to that kind of humble heart God extends His grace, whether it’s saving grace, as in the case of that publican. Jesus said, “He went down to his house” what? “justified.” Or whether it’s forgiving, sanctifying grace, it comes when we humble ourselves like that.

This week, I came across one of the most tragic illustrations of the cost of human pride that I've ever encountered. It was August 31, 1986, 10:00 in the evening: A Soviet passenger ship, called the Admiral Nakhimov, sailed with over a thousand people on board. Just a few minutes into its voyage, the ship's pilot noticed that a Soviet freighter was on a collision course. He radioed a warning to the other ship. And the freighter responded. But the captain of the freighter made no change in course, did nothing to slow his ship, and they continued on a collision course. The captain of the passenger ship decided they were going to stay on course; nothing was going to happen. And he went to bed and left his second mate in charge. A local dispatcher saw on the radar screen that the two ships were headed toward each other. He repeatedly sent warnings to both the passenger ship and the freighter. But neither changed course, or slowed. Only when it was clear that the ships were within seconds of colliding did either ship take action. But it was too late.

About an hour after they'd left port, a freighter rammed into the starboard side of the passenger ship at a speed of five knots. The Admiral Nakhimov immediately began to list to her starboard side. The lights went out. A generator came on for a moment; but two minutes later the lights went to darkness; and people were stumbling their way down the corridors of the sinking ship in darkness. There was no time to launch the lifeboats. Hundreds of people dove into the oily water, grabbing to life jackets and barrels and debris, whatever they could get to hold them. Admiral Nakhimov, the ship, sank in only seven minutes. Passengers and the crew had little time to escape. Over four hundred people lost their lives that night. The investigation found that the sole cause of the accident was human pride. Both captains were sighted for gross negligence and spent fifteen years in prison.

James wants us to know that pride not only puts us on a collision course with others, but it also puts us on a collision course with God, Himself. "God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble."

Next week, we'll learn how it is that we humble ourselves before God, so that we can receive that grace.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are so proud. We ask for your forgiveness. Thank you for using, by Your Spirit, the words of James as a scalpel in our hearts to expose our sinfulness. Lord, I pray that You would help us, as Your people, to humble ourselves before You, to acknowledge our sin, to

acknowledge our need of You. Father, I pray that You would teach us next week how it is we can humble ourselves, so that we can receive the grace we so much need: the grace for forgiveness and the grace for holiness, and the grace for everything that we need in this life. Lord, help us to understand how important this is to You; that You stand opposed to the proud, but You give grace to the humble.

Father, I pray, this morning, for the person who has never humbled themselves before You; the man or the woman who sits here, this morning, proud of who they are and all that they've accomplished; and yet, in abject poverty before You. Father, I pray that You would help them to see the reality this morning; that You would bring them, as it were, to their knees before You, seeking Your forgiveness, seeking Your grace.

We pray this to the glory of Christ and for His sake, Amen.