

Confronting the Enemies of Unity in Our Hearts – Part 4
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James 4:1-12
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Turn with me in your Bibles to the fourth chapter of James, please. We are continuing a message in a series on the unity of the body of Christ. Normally, it's our practice at Providence to preach through books chapter by chapter, verse by verse, but from time to time the Lord puts on our hearts a topic that we need to address and so we will do a topical series. We always try to take the Scripture and address that topic biblically.

We've been looking at the subject of Christian unity for a period of time. We've seen that it's the high calling of all of us who belong to Christ to be one, to manifest the supernatural unity. We've been looking at, most recently, from James. We've had a series of messages from James 3 and 4, beginning in Verse 1 of Chapter 3 all the way through Chapter 4, Verse 12. James is addressing the issue of Christian unity by addressing the enemies of Christian unity, that the Church needs to address some problems. So we call this series of messages, we've entitled it: 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity'.

We've been looking at this latest section, Chapter 4, Verses 1-12. It's our fourth message from this passage, and we call this, the title of this particular little subset is: 'Confronting the Enemies of Unity – In Our Hearts'. James shows that the reason there are divisions and conflicts is because we have heart problems. We want things from our hearts that we ought not want, and we want some things that we ought to want, but we want them too much. We have inordinate desires, and these desires that are out of control lead to conflicts.

James is addressing this issue of how we deal with the heart. He confronts the situation that he's dealing with in the churches he's writing to, as one of discord and disunity. So he challenges their complacency and their contentment. In fact, the tone, as we read the Scripture in a moment, I want you again to listen to the tone of what James says. It's striking, almost stunning really, what he says and how he says it. Because he's trying to, as it were, to wake up his audience, to wake us up. The reason we need to be awakened is we tend to get content or complacent with a certain level of conflict in our lives, and God is greatly grieved by this conflict. He's appalled that we can get comfortable with it, like a level of noise in your life that you just get used to. So James is trying to wake up his readers and us

out of that and then to call us to a better way. Let's read, starting at Verse 1, we'll read Verses 1-12 of James 4.

James 4:1-12:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 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. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit 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 miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

Let's pray together:

Our Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that it is our very life, that it is what brings about the new birth by the power of the Spirit. It causes us to be born again and it is the Word which continues to set us free. We pray that You would help us to continue in Your Word this morning, to continue in these things so that we might be free, as Jesus promised, from the sins that plague us, and the divisions that ought not be in our lives. Help us, Lord. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

The words in this passage are pungent and sharp. We've noted in previous messages that the words 'quarrels and conflicts' could really better be translated more literally. Instead of 'quarrels' it would be 'wars', 'conflicts' would be 'battles'. So James is using very strong words. "Why are these wars and battles going on among you? Because of the desires, the pleasures that wage war in your members." Then he says, "When you lust, you want something and you don't get it, you murder." Those are strong words. "You adulteresses." You feel the force of the words. The tone is caustic, it's intended to burn away the overgrowth in our lives. Like a yard that has not been tended at all for so long that the best thing you can do is just either burn it all or just dig it up to start over. This is the force of this passage. It's a wakeup call. It's essentially a lot like a diagnosis, a very serious diagnosis. We appreciate bedside manner of doctors, and their compassion and empathy, but there are times where hard situations require hard words. There is no way to sugarcoat a serious diagnosis.

I remember our brother Charlie Winsell, who went home to be with the Lord in June, him talking about one of the conversations he had with his doctor a little over a year ago, and the doctor became very plain with Charlie. He told him in no uncertain terms that if he did not act immediately he would be dead very soon. Charlie was a pretty plain-spoken man himself. He appreciated that a lot. Anybody should appreciate that though really, shouldn't they? If you need to know what you've got to do, you need to know the diagnosis so you can go about dealing with it. This passage is like a good physician. James gives a diagnosis, the diagnosis is serious, but the good news is he provides a treatment, and the treatment is sound. In fact, the treatment is sure to bring healing. This is a passage of great hope. There is a way out of entrenched conflicts and broken relationships. There is a path out of those things.

We can also see in this passage that there's a path out of hardened sin patterns. James is writing to those who profess to be Christians. As always, the New Testament makes clear that we are to examine ourselves, and some of those whom he's writing to are probably not really believers, but he writes to them as brothers, addresses them as brothers 15 times in his epistle. There are people who profess to know Christ, and at times, sinners who think they're saved, they're going to have conflicts because they're not saved. But then believers walk in sin because we're deceived, because we're not applying the means of grace, because we're not walking with Christ. So believers who are in conflict can look just like an unbeliever who is not really saved. How do you know? Well you keep focusing on the Gospel and you look at the means of grace, and you see if the Lord has really given you a new heart. Over time you will become more like Jesus. He gives us a

pathway out that's good for believer and unbeliever, because if you follow these steps as an unbeliever, it's salvation. If you follow these steps as a believer, it is sanctification.

So what James does is he says, "Look, things are a whole lot worse than we realize. The level of conflict is much more grievous to God than it is to us." So after waking us up and showing us the diagnosis, he says now, "Here's the way out," and he gives in Verses 6-10, really in Verses 7-10, those four verses, ten imperatives, ten commands, and these commands are the way out. Having seen where we are, he says, "These are the steps out of the mire. These are the steps to overcome hardened sin."

We looked at the first three last time, we started into the fourth, but we're really going to cover the fourth some more today because we didn't really get far enough into it. We looked at the first three though. Let me remind you what those were. We started off with the command 'Humble Yourself', which we noted comes last in the list, but really is first in a sense of it's the foundation. We noted it is first because Verse 6, though it doesn't contain an imperative, Verse 6 says, "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." And then Verse 10 says, "Humble yourselves." You see, that's the imperative, Verse 10, the tenth imperative in the list. But Verse 6 and 10 show us together that it's really the foundational imperative, that the way out of hardened sin is first of all to humble yourself, to lower yourself, to be ready to come down and humble yourself before God. The second imperative we looked at last time was 'Submit to God', to make a decisive commitment to submit our thinking to God, to submit our lives to God. The third imperative was, 'Resist the Devil'. That is, we're to take up arms and to fight, not to be content with allowing sin to reign, but to fight, to resist, to stand against him. Those were the first three we looked at last time. We began to look at the fourth which we're going to look at again today. So really, Lord-willing, we're going to go from four to ten. Some of you who've been here a long time don't think that's likely. We're going to press on and see. The Lord is able.

4) Draw Near to God:

We began looking at this last time. This one is almost as important as 'Humble Yourself'. This one is one of the controlling imperatives that is foundational. It's like a pillar, the 'Humility' and the 'Draw Near to God' are like two pillars under these other imperatives. What we're going to see is that number four stands on its own, in a sense as this pillar. Then numbers five and six go together, and then number seven, eight, nine, and ten go together. So I really I only have like three

points instead of seven, with sub-points within it, but we're going to count it as four to ten. I don't see what was so funny about that?

Okay, "Draw Near to God", that's the fourth imperative. Now let me remind you that all ten of these imperatives are in the aorist tense, which in Greek, tense is about the kind of action more than the time of action. Aorist tense points to a punctiliar action, whereas other tenses are ongoing action. This is a point in time kind of action. The idea is not that it only happens once, but the aorist I think it is used because he is saying that you have to make a decisive movement in all of these imperatives. There must be an intentional and definite act of obedience in all of these imperatives. So first of all, draw near to God, that sense of decisive, intentionally in a definite way, move toward God. When you're caught in sin, when division is in your life, how do you get out? You humble yourself, submit to God, resist the devil, and draw near to God. We find ourselves in sin, turn to God, go toward Him. We find ourselves in temptation, turn to God, go toward Him, move toward Him. What's interesting is this is somewhat counter-intuitive. I think it really is because our intuition is so formed by sin. What was the first thing that Adam and Eve did when they had sinned? They hid from God. "We've sinned. We need to hide from God." What we need to do is come to God. The Scripture exhorts us to do just that. Psalm 27:8, this is echoing just the whole thrust and emphasis of Scripture. The Psalmist writes:

Psalm 27:8 ~ When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."

When you are in sin, when you are dealing with sin, when you're tempted, what is the Lord saying to you? "Seek My face!" Decisively seek His presence. Psalm 16:8, David writes:

Psalm 16:8 ~ I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

How do you overcome, David? "It's because I have set the Lord continually before me. I have made a decisive commitment to seek God, to set Him before me. And since He's at my right hand, I won't be shaken in the conflict."

Psalm 119:10 ~ With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments.

We are to seek the Lord with everything that we can. When dirty, when the filth of the world, the filth of the pig sty is upon us, we need to turn and go to God. We

need to be like the prodigal son who when he came to himself, remember when he came to himself? He's gone from his father who loved him. He's squandered away all of his wealth in riotous living. He's had to hire himself out as like the lowliest kind of employee. He doesn't have enough to eat. When he's hungry there feeding the pigs, as he pours the slop into the trough he thinks, "I'm hungry. That almost looks good to me right now." He wanted to eat some of the pods in the trough. The Scripture says he came to himself. What did he do? What is the first thing he said? "I will go back to my father." That is what has to happen. Sin wants, and Satan wants us to run away from God. When you are struggling, when you've realized that you've sinned, when you feel temptation, when you feel the struggle and its intensity, you feel like you might be going over the waterfall. What do you do? Turn to God! Don't do it on your own, turn to Him, go directly to Him. What does seeking Him look like? It means first of all praying, cry out to God. That's what this Scripture exhorts us to do. Cry out to your Father. "Lord, I need help." Call the Scripture to mind and be in the Scripture. Decisively determine, "I'm going to pray more. I'm going to seek Him in His Word more. I'm seeking His face." Where do you find the face of God? You find the face of God in Christ. Where do you find Christ? The Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, Jesus. That's what we need.

So you resolve to pray, you call out to Him, you bring His Word to bear in your life. You memorize Scripture related to the areas that you're struggling with. You focus on Christ. You focus on the means of grace. I mean, if you want to overcome sin, you have to take advantage of all the ways you can seek the Lord. One of the things that is an irony sometimes is that when we're going through difficult times, and we see this as we counsel sometimes, counseling folks that are struggling, one of the things that surprises me is that we'll have a counseling meeting on Tuesday sometimes, and then I don't see them on Wednesday or Sunday. That's Satan deceiving them. I mean, there may be a reason, somebody is sick or something, but if I'm really trying to get out of the mire of sin, I've got to seek God with everything that I can. I need to be with the people of God. So we need to have that mindset of the hymn, "I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord. I need Thee every hour, I need Thee." And so the determination to draw near to God, in the temptation, after we've sinned, whatever, draw near to God. That's the fourth imperative. This one kind of continues to carry, especially the next couple, but really, as I said, 'Draw Near to God' is like a pillar because it is really about humbling myself and seeking His face. All of the other imperatives are really about those two things. Now watch how we see this.

5) Cleanse Your Hands:

First of all, the next imperative: ‘Cleanse Your Hands, You Sinners’, in Verse 8.

James 4:8 ~ Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

These two go together. Remember that James is writing to a predominantly Jewish Christian audience. He’s writing to people who know, are steeped in the Old Testament, and when he uses these two words, these two images, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, his readers would have immediately seen that this was imagery directly from the tabernacle in the temple. Remember that the Nation of Israel is given God’s presence. Remember when the Lord revealed His glory to them and delivered them through from Egypt through the Exodus? What was the first thing that he did? He takes them to Mount Sinai and He gives them His law, and goes into covenant with them, but He’s already planted His presence there and He gives them the rules of the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was the tent of meeting, later the temple. Ultimately, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that. But the tabernacle was the tent of meeting, and the idea was how can sinners get into the presence of God? And this tabernacle and the temple were the Lord teaching us. One of the important things to understand about the Bible is that God speaks, as He speaks from the beginning of Scripture to the end, there’s a progressive nature to Revelations. He starts out with more simple things and builds upon them. It’s all consistent from Genesis from Revelation, but you see this building at work. One of the things that you see is that man is in darkness, and as God begins to reveal His Word to him, He starts to shine the light through images that are almost like John Calvin said, ‘baby talking’. There’s a sense in which God prattles with us, Calvin said. We can’t understand the whole mind of God, and certainly throughout Scripture we still can’t understand the entire mind of God. We’ll spend eternity glorying and knowing more of the mind of God, but as Scripture goes you have more and more clarity. At the beginning, the picture that God gave to show how a sinner can come to the presence of God was the tabernacle.

The tabernacle had the innermost part where the presence of God dwelled, there on the Ark of the Covenant was called ‘The Most Holy Place’, or ‘The Holy of Holies’. That was separated by a veil. Then the holy place, which was all enclosed in a tent, called ‘The Tent of Meeting’. That tent was a part of a larger tabernacle structure which had a court around it. There was a court and if they were clean, had

done what they needed to do, had clean hands and pure heart, they could go in, they could give their offering to a priest who would offer it for them. The priest then would go into 'The Holy Place' and make the appropriate offering, sprinkling blood, or making the appropriate meal offering. The person standing outside has the priest go for him, and then once a year, only one time a year, could the high priest go into the inner chamber, 'The Holy of Holies'. Do you see the sense of distance that there is? From man in his sin to God? In fact, to even go into the courts, you had to be a male. Women couldn't go in. You had to be clean. You had to have not touched an unclean animal. You had to have not touched a dead body. For so long you had to have gone through certain rites of purification. You see, to get to God, we have to be clean. Even the priest now, in the imagery of now the cleansing and purification, particularly would have called to mind for the Jews, the priest who were able to go into 'The Holy Place'. They were able to actually go into the tent, them and them alone. No other men could go into the tent but the priest. But the priest, to go into the tent, they had to wash their hands. They had to go through certain rituals of purification. So what is happening here is if you go through the purification, and you go through the washing, you get closer to the presence of God. That's the image. See how this follows from that, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your heart you double-minded. The imagery is: Draw near to God, but as you draw near to God you've got to wash, you've got to be purified. Now what is that representing? I mean ultimately, we know that we come to God through Jesus Christ. We come to God, and this is the amazing wonder of the Gospel, that though 'The Holy of Holies' was, as I said, this inner sanctuary within the larger sanctuary, that could only be entered one time a year by one man—the high priest. I mean, think about that, there's one person in the whole nation that's going to go into the presence of God this year, it's the high priest. He goes on the 'Day of Atonement'. Such a fearful thing to enter into God's presence because He's holy and we're so sinful. In fact, the high priest had to be washed appropriately, he had to have on all his garments that had significance at representing purity and holiness. One of the things he had to do was, in his garment were woven bells, little jingling bells. One of the reasons they were woven there is because when he goes into 'The Holy of Holies', no one else can go in, and if we hear bells, we know he's still alive. In fact, the high priest would go in with a rope tied around his ankle because if the bells stopped ringing, they would pull him out by the rope. No one could go beyond the veil except the high priest.

Now, this is what makes this so amazing. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 4:14-16:

Hebrews 4:14-16 ~ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What he's saying is, "Because of Jesus Christ, if you believe in Christ, if you've repented of your sins and placed your faith in Christ, you can go into 'The Holy of Holies' at any moment, and you're to do so boldly. This was almost unthinkable, so great though. How does it happen? Because we have so great a High Priest. Jesus Christ is finished with sin. So we can, at any moment, with sin on us, with the filth of the pig sty on us, you can now go into 'The Holy of Holies' because if through faith in Christ, you come clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. God doesn't look at you as the filth that you have on you. That has already been punished on the cross. Every sin that we've ever committed, Jesus Christ paid the full debt. He exhausted the wrath of God of every sin of everyone who would ever believe. Every single one! So there remains no more wrath. We sang a hymn a moment ago, "There is no condemnation. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The wrath is gone and when we come in, we come in clothed in His righteousness. You say, "I'm not fit to go in." Of course you're not, but Jesus is, and the only question is: Is Jesus worthy? Yes! He's worthy! So we're to run into the Throne Room of God.

Do you notice in 4:16, He says: ...***so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*** When do you need mercy? When you sin! When do you need grace? When you're being tempted. So run into the Throne Room. The tendency that we have is that we want to say, "Okay, here I am struggling again. I've got to do better. Lord, I know Your Word. I'm going to do this, and I'm going to show You that I love You." And we try to do it almost cut off, like a branch that's not attached to the vine. Well, what are you going to do if your branch is not attached to the vine? You are going to bear no fruit. But if you run to the Vine, "Jesus, here I am struggling, and I feel in my heart these desires. I feel in my heart the desire to do the same thing that I've been doing, to lose my temper again. Lord, I have these things here, oh wretched man that I am," and you cling to Christ. When you cling to Him, that's the beginning of turning it around.

Now, cleanse your hands and purify your hearts, the idea is that over time what happens is, as you draw near to God, you can only draw near because Jesus has

clean hands and a pure heart, but He's going to clean up your hands and He's going to purify your heart. What does that mean? The hands refer to actions. The heart refers to the affections, the thoughts. He wants, as you draw near to God, the way that you're going to be free from sin, is He is going to deal with your actions and He's going to deal with your affections and your thoughts. The closer you get to the Lord, you're going to be convicted. "What I'm doing is wrong. This action that I've been doing is totally wrong." You're to put off and put on like Ephesians 4:22-32 says. Put off the old man. Put off lying. Put on speaking the truth. Put off angry words, and put on words of blessing and edification. But it's going to take changing our actions. We're going to have to be willing to let things go, and seeking God means you're willing. You come, but you come opening your hand. "Lord, look at this mess I have. Look at these desires I have. Look at these actions I have. I don't want to hold onto them and I want You to cleanse me." But you bring them to God.

Then purify your heart, actions flow from our hearts. Our bad habits aren't going to change unless our hearts change, the affections. Thomas Manton, the Puritan, writes in his commentary on James:

If you want to have a holy life, you must get a clean heart. True conversion begins there. Spiritual life, as well as natural life, is in the heart first.

Isaiah 55:7 ~ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.

Manton writes:

Notice that it is not only his way, or course of life, but his thoughts. The frame of his heart, the heart is the womb of thoughts, and thoughts are the first things that come from corruption.

So God is interested in the heart. We read earlier, Psalm 51:6 where David says:

***Psalm 51:6 ~ Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.***

The Lord wants to deal with our hearts, so if you want to draw near to God, you have to be willing to let Him have your life. All of the actions, "My hands, Lord, You have to wash them, but I'm bringing them to you. I'm not saying, 'Wash my hands,' and holding some things back. Bring it all, and I know He's got to purify my heart. Lord, purify my heart. Everything. I want my affections to be

transformed.” The closer we get to the Lord the more aware we are of how unholy we are. But if we come with the desire to seek His face, “Lord, my actions, my thoughts, my way of thinking, I want to change these things.” I mentioned counseling earlier, discipleship is really all that we do. Counseling is just a word we borrow from sort of the modern culture. When we have a sin problem, what we need is to be discipled. We need to be able to walk and follow Christ. What does that do? Where does that come from? It comes from loving Christ, and it comes from changing my way of thinking, and making it bow before the Word of God. So if we’re going to be free, if our actions are going to change, if we’re going to cleanse our hands, we have to purify our hearts. The reason that we do the things we do is we believe the things that we believe. I mean, the reason that we have uncontrollable anger that gets the best of us is because, like James said, we have desires in us that we want so badly, and these desires are controlling us. How do you change that? You repent of the desire, and you replace it with a godly thought. I mentioned that sometimes these things surprise us, and we don’t see how wicked they are. We have desires. I mentioned that you can have a desire for your children to obey you. It’s a good desire. There’s nothing wrong with that. That’s actually a godly desire, for our children to honor the Lord, right? ***Children, be obedient in the Lord, for this is right.*** But isn’t it amazing how that can turn into something that’s not pure?

A few weeks back, I mentioned that I’d read in one of my counseling books where this guy was confessing, and I thought, “Man, that’s just me.” He said, “Why is it that I care more about my children’s obedience when I have company? It’s because apparently what I want is to look good. I want you to obey, yes, but I really want dad’s reputation protected.” That’s an idol. How do you overcome, then, the tendency to get angry and blow up at a child (after the company leaves, of course)? How do you get over that? You repent of the inward attitude, the inward desire to have a reputation, for my children to give me reputation. Repent of that.

Lord, all that matters is Your reputation. Make me of no reputation just like Jesus. Is a servant greater than his Master? What am I looking for reputation for? You start meditating on the fact that you’re a slave and a servant, and as a dad, you’re to be servant of the whole family, and then that will change. You will have your heart purified. But one of the things that’s so important about this cleansing and purifying is it means that if we’re going to be victorious over sin - the imagery of the temple that I was telling you about, the priest had to wash his hands to go through purification. It’s so important that we maintain a Godward focus as we fight sin. It sounds simple, and yet it’s so elusive.

What do I mean? I mean it's so subtle the shift that even when I recognize that it's wrong for me to have this desire for reputation and I want to be free of that, I can very easily want to be free of that desire because I hate it. Now, do you see the difference between me hating that and me wanting to please the Lord by getting rid of that which displeases Him? Do you see that? I want to be free of this bondage because it makes me sick. It embarrasses me. That's not a Godward focus. What we want to do is say, "Lord, cleanse my hands. Purify my heart, because I want more of You. I want to be in closer fellowship with You." The reality is if you have repented and believed, nothing can change your standing before God. His grace and His love are flowing down. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But what our sin does and what purification does then is purification from sin enables us to enjoy more of the love that is unchanging. We can't enjoy it because we are caught in sin, and the more we become holy, it's like the cup is being turned upside down like this so that it can be filled with God's love. That's what sanctification is. But turning from sin must always be Godward.

The real issue is like what David said:

Psalm 51:4 ~ Against Thee, and Thee only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight,...

That's the issue. So, Lord, cleanse my hands. Purify my heart. I want to be clean and pure so that I can come and experience the wonder and the glory of Your presence in a deeper way.

So draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your heart, and then he has four imperatives, one after another. Particularly, the first three go together, but the fourth follows right up after it. He says number 7: Be miserable. Number 8: Mourn. Number 9: Weep. Number 10: Let your laughter be turned into mourning. There are four imperatives there in Verse 9, all about mourning and weeping. What the Lord is saying is if you want to be free from sin, you draw near to God, you cleanse your hands, you purify your heart, you make it your goal to put off sin, to have your heart transformed by the power of His Word, but be prepared, because you've also got to make this determination or you will not be free. You must be determined to be miserable, to mourn, to weep, and to let your laughter be turned into mourning. It doesn't mean that you never have laughter again. The Christian is not the person who's miserable. In fact, the Christian is to be marked by joy. But what he's saying is if you want to seek the Lord, the pathway to the throne room of God involves mourning and weeping. Why is that? It's because when you get closer to God, you see your sin. When we get closer to God, we see our sin with

greater clarity. We see the ugliness. We see the horror of it, and it ought to make us mourn. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the kingdom of God. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Coming into the presence of God involves mourning. Think about the people who come into God’s presence. A particular example of this is Isaiah 6. When Isaiah went to the temple that day to worship the Lord, he had no idea what was going to happen, but that day God was going to pull back the veil and let him see His glory. Do you remember what Isaiah saw?

Isaiah 6:1 ~ In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

They kept saying to one another in this kind of cacophony:

Isaiah 6:3 ~ ...“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.

The foundations of the thresholds of the temple shook, and the whole place was filled with smoke. And what did Isaiah do?

Isaiah 6:5 ~ Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am undone! For I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell among a people of unclean lips;

I don’t think Isaiah came to the temple that day worried about his lips, but when he came into the presence of God, suddenly he saw his sin. And as for “unclean lips”, I don’t think he was saying that he was profane or prone to use curse words. What he meant is, “What I have said about God, by my life and in my words, what I have said about the Holy One of Israel is so far from reality that my mouth is just filthy, and I dwell among a people of filthy mouths, for my eyes have seen the Lord.” So when you come into the presence of God, you’re going to see your sin, and when you and I see our sin and see it rightly, it ought to make us miserable. It ought to make us mourn and weep. And the closer we get to Him, the more we’re going to see it.

Spurgeon speaks of the sweetness, though, of this sorrow, because this really is a call to sorrow, a profound sorrow that is part of the path of victory out of sin,

Godly sorrow that Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 7, true repentance and Godly sorrow. Spurgeon writes this. He says:

Drawing near to God will help us to sorrow for sin. "Oh," says some thoughtless person, "I do not want to be helped to sorrow for sin." And yet if you did but know it, one of the sweetest things in all the world is Godly sorrow for sin.

The most sweetest treasure is to see your sin, to be broken hearted over it. Why is that? Spurgeon goes on:

Often do I quote to myself that verse:

*"Lord, let me weep for nought for sin!
And after none but thee!
And then I would -- O that I might,
A constant weeper be!"*

"It is a bitter sweet," say some, but I say that it is a sweet bitter and that the sweetness predominates—the sweetness of so feeling the evil of sin as to loathe and shun it, and the sweetness of seeing the glory of my Savior who washes me.

You can't be saved until you're lost, and that's the experience of the Christian, a salvation not just from the penalty of sin when we repent, believe and are justified, but salvation from the power of sin comes that same pathway, seeing the ugliness, mourning over it, and then being delivered.

A helpful illustration to me of what the Christian life should look like is imagine that you come into a house and let's say you come into my house. No, it's not my house. I'm not married if it's my house, because this would be a bad reflection on my wife. If it were my house, and God had not given me a wife, if you came into my house and I was single, and I had a dimmer switch, and God says, "Ty, it's kind of messy in here," because the light's on, the dimmer's on a little bit, I look around and I say, "Yeah, you're right. It is kind of messy." The light's fairly dim, but I can see that there is some stuff on the floor and there are things out of place, and so with that level of light, I see that I need to clean it up. So I set about cleaning it up. I pick up the things that I see, and I put things back in place that I can see, and then what happens is the picture is we keep seeking the Lord and He turns up the light. And now I look at my house, and God comes in and says, "Look at your house, Ty. I see the carpet is stained. What is that? What is that dirt and grime on the wall?" And so I begin to see that it's going to require cleansing and

I'm embarrassed. "Look at this. How could I have the Lord come into my house in this mess?" So I clean it up. Then the light turns up more and I see even more.

Do you see? The Christian life is one of perpetually walking closer to God as He's turning up the light, and the paradox is that your life becomes cleaner, and cleaner, and cleaner in Christ over time. There are still ups and downs, of course, but basically the life of the Christian is becoming cleaner and cleaner, and yet being more appalled at one's own sin as you go, because you now see the stuff that's grimier now that the bright light shows, and there's greater humility and greater brokenness, and the wonder of it: greater sweetness, because there's no better place than to be broken before the cross.

One of my favorite verses in all of Scripture is Isaiah 57:15. I mentioned Isaiah who had the vision in the temple. One theme of his book might be: *The Lord, the Holy One of Israel – Yahweh – the Holy One of Israel. The High.* Holy means transcendent, separate, and exalted. Listen to what he says in Isaiah 57:15.

***Isaiah 57:15 ~ For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,...***

His NAME is Holy.

...“I dwell on a high and holy place,

That's what we would expect. The Lord whose Name is Holy dwells in high and lofty places. He dwells 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.”***

The word for contrite means crushed into dust. That's what the Hebrew word means there. The Lord is transcendent in holiness, and righteousness, and majesty. He dwells in high and lofty places, and He also comes down to dwell with the person who's broken. Oh, that we might ever more broken be, so that we might have Him with us. James says this is the path to freedom. You humble yourself. You submit to God. You resist the devil. You draw near to God. You cleanse your life. You cleanse your hearts. You mourn, you weep, you let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom, and all the way you find more of the

glory of Christ, and you find yourself more and more set free, but it's all rooted in who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

Let's pray together...

Our Father, we praise You, oh Lord, for You are the Holy One. You are so high and so Holy as to not be able to look at sin, Your Word tells us, and yet, such is the work of Your Son, so powerful and effective was His work that He takes sinners who are filthy like us, and He makes us so clean that we can come into the Holy of holies even now. So powerful and mighty is His blood that He's taken all of Your wrath away and He's left only love, and kindness, and grace.

Father, help us to be more able to comprehend this amazing love, to bask in the ocean that is the love of Christ, to marvel, and Lord, to be transformed by it, that we would hate sin, because it's that which we had to be cleansed from originally, it's that which dishonors You, and it's that which even now limits our ability to see Your glory. Help us hate it. Help us long for the day when we will be washed finally and forever from this body of sin, when we will stand before the presence of Your glory blameless, no more sin. How clean we will feel. How glorious a day when we see Jesus as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself as He is pure. Purify us, Lord, through that hope. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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