

“The Camel in Your Tent”

James 4:7-17

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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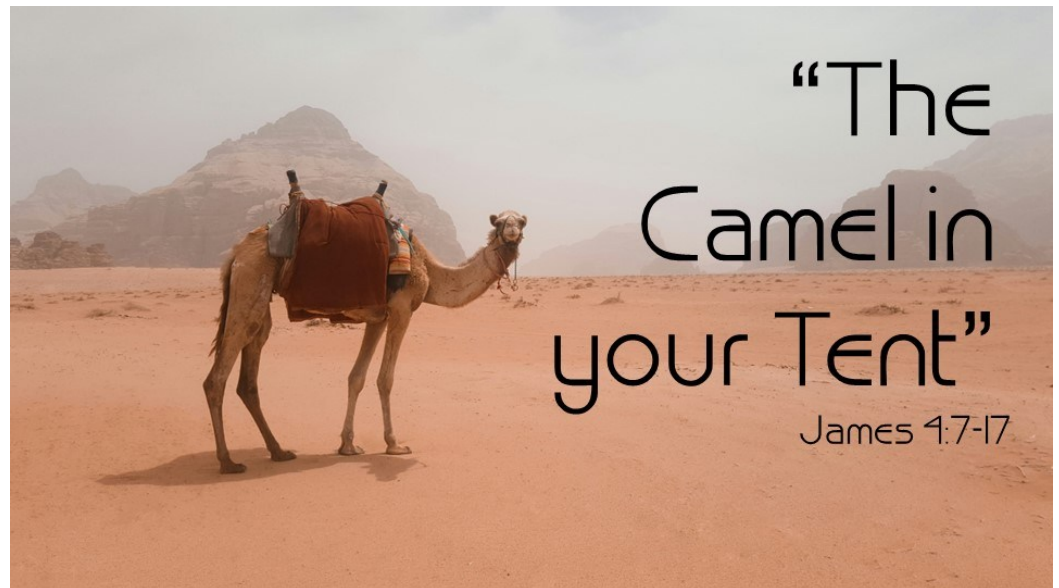
7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw

near to you. Cleanse [your] hands, [you] sinners; and purify [your] hearts, [you] double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and [your] joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. 11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what [will happen] tomorrow. For what [is] your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you [ought] to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do [it], to him it is sin.

One cold night, as a sheik lay in his tent, a camel thrust the flap aside and looked in. “I pray thee, master,” he said, “let me put my nose within the tent, for it is cold outside.” “By all means,” yawned the sheik, who was bored and listless from having reposed on his pillows all day. “Do so if you wish.” The camel pushed his nose into the tent. “If I might but warm my neck also,” he said presently. “It’s all the same to me,” answered the sheik. So the beast stuck his neck inside, and contented itself for a while by looking about. Soon the camel, who had been turning his head from side to side, spoke up again. “It will take but little more room if I put my forelegs within the tent. I would feel a great deal better.” The sheik simply shrugged and rolled to one side to make little more room. The camel had hardly planted his forefeet within the tent when he said, “Master, I’m keeping the flap open by standing here like this. I think I ought to come all the way inside.” “Whatever you like,” the sheik nodded, moving over some more so the beast might enter. So the camel came forward and crowded into the tent. No sooner was he inside than he looked hard at the sheik. “I think,” he said, “that there is not enough room for both of us here. It will be best for you to stand outside, as you are the smaller. Then there will be room enough for me.” And with that he pushed the sheik out into the cold and darkness.

Perhaps you’ve heard this old proverb...one that tells the tale: “*Never let the camel get its nose under the tent, because the rest of the body will follow.*”

The camel didn’t bust his way into the tent, loudly and overtly announcing his intentions to “take over” and yet the end result was the same. He was slow, gentle, and almost passive about it. It was a “silent coup.” The camel



appears to have practiced something known today as “gradualism.” It starts out getting the nose into the tent... *also known as getting one’s foot in the door.* It’s comparable to another metaphor we often use: *Give someone an inch and they’ll take a mile.*

James seems to have been dealing with this idea on some level thus far and he certainly breaches the issue today in our text. Indeed many of us have lived lives of spiritual, physical and personal compromise which has resulted in addictions, broken marriages, legal records, obesity, financial bondage, and of course broken relationship with the Creator. No one started out with a plan to dive into what was eventually the ultimate outcome. But “drip, drip, drip” we made it there just the same...

You see, we get the idea that God wants our life and soul...we often fail to grasp that He is also asking for your body.

Rom 12:1 says, “*And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice — the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.*”

Jehovah of scripture is “God”...in that there would be little argument here today. The dividing issue, *that which “separates the sheep from the goats,”* is not whether He is God but whether He is **Lord**. At least *my* Lord! If we say that He is our Lord as well as our God, then we have therefore allowed Him that controlling and absolute place in our hearts, minds, and living, and yes again, our physical bodies. Many folks, however, want to reject all human involvement and accountability from the Christian experience. They chant “grace, grace, grace!” which they want to understand as a “free pass” from personal participation and involvement in our Christian experience. When they say “it’s all God”...*which sounds great...* **they** mean it does not involve their activity, effort, or *shall I dare say* “works,” in any way. Their belief is that being saved by grace means I am free from any responsibility or participation in the actual walk of faith.

The root of the problem lies in the application of grace in *salvation* verses the application of grace in *discipleship*...in *maturing*... in the *living out of our faith post redemption*. As is generally the case, such false doctrines have one common mistake, and that is simply “the Bible.” It is astonishing when faced with hundreds of scriptural passages that blatantly say the opposite of such a position, but the same is true with other false teaching...like hyper-Calvinism, and yet the “reformed” movement is still out there presenting their gospel as *the* gospel, when their “good news” is not only not scriptural, it is not in any way “good news.” John 3:16 clearly and absolutely settles *that* issue without even going any further which we definitely could!

We are being called here by James to “submit to God.” The existence of such a directive would obviously mean that it is possible **not to**, or at least to **try not to**. The text as a whole today is clearly calling you and I to personal and serious engagement. James is saying “**YOU** do these things...The battle thus emerges here: *the fight to die to self...the struggle to seek first the Kingdom of God.*

Matt Chandler, in the book, “To Live is Christ and to Die is Gain,” said, “One of the best ways to get grace wrong is to believe it means we don’t work in the Christian life. But as Dallas Willard says, ‘Grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning.’ Nobody stumbles into godliness, ever. It simply doesn’t happen. There is no autopilot mode for the Christian life. We never see people in the Bible growing in godliness by coasting along.”

Many of us would like to isolate James in this issue, but he is not alone:

1Pe 5:8 “**Be sober, be vigilant;** because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

1Pe 5:9 “**Resist him, steadfast in the faith**, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”

Eph 6:11 “**Put on the whole armor of God** that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

1Pe 2:13 “Therefore **submit yourselves...**”

The list of passages of this nature are many! Paul understood this...having begun his new life with such an understanding. Right out of the gate, he prayed, “*trembling and astonished*, [saying], *Lord, what do You want me to do?*” (Acts 9:6)

As mentioned last week, we can often seek God to bless our decisions and empower all our efforts whether they are His plan for us or not. Thus again, our prayers end up being, “God, *gimme...*” Our energies are exerted trying to get God on our train instead of doing battle against Satan and our flesh in an effort to get on God’s! So we have simple direction from James here. No misunderstanding can be claimed as he clearly and simply states, “**(you) submit yourselves to God.**”

Period.

According to verse six, He resists us, or in translation, “opposes us” if we fight Him over this sovereign position. Obviously this can be ...*and certainly is*, a dangerous place to reside. In Judges 2:1-3, we are told about how the children of Israel found themselves in such a place:

“Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars. But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, I will not drive them out (their enemies) before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.”

On the other side, in the position of “grace to the humble,” there is literally no limit to what that believer can succeed at.

The problem is the constant pull backward into worldliness. The temptation to compromise. The drag toward gradualism and spiritual passivism. We must admit that such concessions...such worldly accommodations, are really closer than we might think. It's a dire problem, because this power behind it all is coming not just from “out there” but also from “in here...” The problem of worldliness, James says, is a problem that actually originates in the heart. We certainly see the results today! The fruit of this is evident in the world that we live in.

However, the cause is **in here**, in our selfishness! We really need to stop seeing the enemy as *out there* and start facing the fact that, in truth, it is *in here*. Some folks never get that and keep moving from place to place, church to church, job to job, marriage to marriage, always attempting to run from a “bad situation,” when the bad **was** always and **still is** emanating from inside **them**, thus they literally carried this “pox” from place to place!

The text has told us that God gives grace to the humble. He gives us a greater grace. And we need it! Because today we are surrounded by a world, a culture that, for many of us, is prevailing. The world offers its stuff, and

we like its stuff! The world pushes its thinking, its belief, its behavior. We like that thinking and belief and behavior to some measure, and we want to have some of it in our own life. To make matters worse, the world has a way of saying to us that some of our ways are out of step, archaic, old school, and we begin to think we're somehow kind of squirrely. So we begin to slowly and subtly abandon the ways of the Lord and walk in the ways of the world.

What's the answer here? What do we do with this? How do we "resist the devil?" What does that actually look like, *practically speaking*? Does this mean we are to spend all of our time attempting to hang tough, face the devil down at the OK Corral, and pull ourselves up by the bootstraps? Oh no! For many have tried this, and just as many have thus failed. Here is the position of victory in verse eight: "near to God." We move toward Him and He meets us. We step up and He empowers us. We go to battle and He equips us. We do this through prayer, worship, meditation upon Him, and fellowship of service. It is a spiritual, physical, and mental battleground. But make no mistake, it requires our personal participation and affirmation.

Our success in all of this lies in drawing "near to the Master." The engulfing...the baptizing, of ourselves in the Holy Spirit's presence, power, and activities, which is God's response to us saddling up close to Him. In doing this, we fight from a position of victory already attained. Just like in the Promised Land of the Old Testament, we fight in the light of a victory not only assured, but in truth, already completed in Christ. Ephesians 6:10 says it best: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord ...and in the power of **His** might." Amen!

But it takes commitment, humility, and time. And again, it takes your grace-driven effort. "*Cleanse your hands...purify your hearts...*" I must seek to unload all that causes communion between He and I to be stifled. All that is not **of** or **from** God must be repented of and left behind. If **I** am willing, *so is He*. Most of us say, "Yes, I am willing!" But like the man in Mark 9:24, we tend to actually approach the issue as he did: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" That's called being "double minded."

The term "double minded" is the idea of "double souled." It speaks of the individual with divided interests, a divided heart. Regardless of the thousands who attempt it each day, we CANNOT have love for this world and for God. To say we **cannot** is not to say we **MAY not**, but rather that it **is an impossibility**. It cannot be done! If we try to do so, the winner is the world by default. It takes a conscious decision and purposeful movement to walk in Christ. No one falls into holy living, a successful life, and abundant blessing by accident.

Notice again our personal involvement in the call to humility in verse ten. We are told to, "*humble yourselves...*" It is a conscious decision, a purposeful action on our part! It is clearly something we are told to actually act upon. This does not mean the Holy Spirit is not participatory in the equipping, but it DOES mean that ultimately WE are to do it, and not wait around for a supernatural unction from God to fall upon us and make us humble! Indeed it only comes through a constant drawing near to God (and thus His involvement) but also a constant acknowledgment of who we are, what we are, and where we came from. Practically speaking, this happens only through engulfing ourselves in His Word, surrounding ourselves in fellowship with the body of Christ, and stepping out in service so He can interact with us through it. When we remain "separate," we quickly lose our personal perspective and start to think we are okay... that we are on some "spiritual plane,"...that we are "finished," and our failure to grasp the truth of who we are, will be our eventual undoing. We will find ourselves "outside the tent..."

When we fail to walk in humility, when we fail to understand what and who we are in truth, it is not long before we...every time without fail...start criticizing others around us. Then, when we speak evil of another, *especially one of God's other children*, we in essence, step into God's place; **the place of judgment**. We are being called to a lifetime of attention. Not *requested*, but actually *demand*ed in our own walk with God, if we desire and

expect to operate in that Holy Spirit “power zone.” We never arrive at any point in our lives where we can set down the mirror and pick up the magnifying glass to scrutinize the standing of another before God. Only God gets to be God and do “God things.” When we condemn another, we go even beyond taking control of our own lives, and we move into the audacity of seeking to control another.

Our perspective on this issue should be clear to us, for as James points out, we don’t even truthfully have control of our **own** lives! What makes us think we have the ability to call the shots for another? Understanding our mortality and being honest about our human and spiritual frailty should keep us on the correct path in this issue. We are nothing more than a vapor that will be here one moment and gone the next. Therefore, what should be our future plan? How about “*that I might finish my course with joy*” (Acts 20:24)?

Note that this does not direct us to live with no plans for tomorrow, or to simply live ‘for the moment.’ Often this is how the **world** lives, and with no problem in doing so, for they live in a realm where each moment is all they have for sure! But we are on a mission and so we should rightfully have a plan as to how we are going to fulfill that calling....how we are going to finish the race. But the fact remains that God alone is dictating this moment, as well as the next one, and the next. James has been driving home the point that GOD IS IN CONTROL. GOD IS CALLING THE SHOTS. For many of us, this is a comfort and a joyous surrender. Yet for others, even His own children, it is a reality that is constantly struggled against. Will we choose to humble ourselves to His sovereignty, or attempt to operate in a lifelong rebellion to our own detriment?

The world lives as if they will always have a tomorrow. Yet the true believer lives in the light of the fact that if he or she **has** a tomorrow, it is in the hands of God! If you did not have that tomorrow, would you have regret? Would you sorrow in the fact that you never got around to placing Christ first...finding out completely and absolutely why you were born? Never actually doing anything to contribute to His glory and Kingdom growth on this planet?

Our self-satisfied blind confidence is not only misplaced, but it is sin. We not only cannot control even the least of life’s dealings, to attempt to try is the way of this world, the way of the flesh, the way of sin and rebellion. James, as he has through his letter thus far, is calling us to take the next step of our faith: to move beyond the salvation grace so freely bestowed on us and move into “walking in grace.” To actually place Him in the lordship position of our lives and to allow Him that sovereign place.

By attempting to hold on to the control of a life redeemed by Christ is flatly and emphatically placed in the realm of sin. Not the politically correct terms in which we place it today. Not easy phrases like backslidden, struggle, or weakness. It is **sin**. Sin to be repented of, ...sin to be denied. He wants to be Lord of your life. He is asking you to give Him that reign. Not allowing Him that place is sin.