

## **James: Faith Works / Sermon 8: Pride vs Humility**

**July 17, 2016** (with thanks to Tim Keller)

I hear Capital City is a Poke stop, so I brought my Poke ball to catch any of them that might show up ... I hear you've "gotta catch 'em all." And I hear some of them taste like bacon! How many of you guys have any idea what I'm talking about? The rest of you probably will soon.

Now ... We live in a culture that tells me I can build my own religion. I can take a piece from here, a piece from there, and construct my own beliefs about God – whatever makes me comfortable. Have you talked to people like that? Even we Jesus followers get sucked into the game. There are Christians who think they can pick and choose. I can take this part of the Bible and run with it, but on this part ... I just don't buy it. Even we are tempted to shape God to suit us. But I'm just don't think God morphs into any shape we need.

And ... we live in a culture that tells us we don't need church to have a relationship with God. "I can accept God and blow off the church, can't I? I can be "spiritual" without all the baggage of church, can't I?" After all, churches are messy. That's what most of your neighbors think.

But we're working our way through the book of James this summer. James was the half-brother of Jesus (same mom, different dad). He was a leader in the early church and wrote this book of Christian wisdom. And James doesn't buy it. He doesn't believe we can build our own religion, and he doesn't believe we can blow off the church and still be good with God. A little later one of the most influential Christian teachers put it like this: "No one can have God as Father who does not have the church as Mother." (Cyprian) Do you buy that? An old preacher put it this way: "If the church ain't your momma, God ain't your daddy." And he was dead on! That's what we believe, and that's what the Bible teaches. In fact, most of this book by James is about how to do life in community, in a church family. Because you can't be God-honoring without it.

The importance of Christian community was in the text we studied last week, I just didn't pull it out. If you were here last week we unpacked a couple huge ideas. #1: God is for God. It's not about you; you are not the point. He is. And #2: God designed our lives to work best when we live for

God. The Creator designed us so that our life is best when He is our center. But what I didn't emphasize last week is that a life lived for God will be worked out in community, his plan included church. It's not just about me and God, it's about doing life with God together.

Here's where we left off last week – James 3.17. James contrasts our world's wisdom (which he calls 'stupid'), with the wisdom that comes from God. He says, "The wisdom from above (God's wisdom) is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere." (James 3.17) And if you think about it, all these descriptors require community, doing life together. God's kind of wisdom is peace loving: which means we learn to get along. It's gentle: with people, who are sometimes hard to get along with. It's full of mercy: which means we give people better than they deserve. It's full of good works: towards people. It's impartial, without prejudice – towards people. You see, living out God's wisdom is about how we live together in community.

And then James says, "Those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness." (James 3.18) That 'righteousness is a really big word in the Bible. As Trump would say, it's huuuge. And it can mean two things. Sometimes 'righteousness' is about my relationship with God. When my sins have been forgiven, I have been put right with God, I am righteous, not because of anything I have done, but because of what Jesus did for me. But sometimes righteousness is about my relationship with you guys, and with all the other people around me. Do I live 'rightly'? Do I live righteously? Do I do life with integrity? Am I loving people the way God tells me to?

And you see, with James, it goes both ways. Righteousness is not an either / or, it's a both / and. It's about being right with God, and being right with you. In fact the Bible tells us, if I am not right with you, I can't be right with God. That's hard! But the two go together. So this harvest of righteousness includes a community of faith, a church.

And here's the deal, here's the big idea: God cannot transform you into what he meant you to be unless you are willing to invest yourself in a God-honoring community. Do you buy that? When we invest in a church family, we put ourselves in a place where God can morph us into what he

meant us to be. Now we don't like that much. We push back. Because we live in a culture that worships individualism. We live in a culture that tells us, "I can be who I want to be, and I can do what I want to do, and I don't need you to get it done." That's just pounded into us. It doesn't take community to mature me, "I make myself who I am." That's what our world tells us. Do you remember how last week we said there is wisdom, and there is stupid? Well, guess what? We just stepped into stupid again. You see, that idea that I can be who I want to be without being in community is a fiction, it's a self-serving myth.

Here's reality. In reality every one of us is the product of our relationships. We are shaped by our family, by our friends, by our neighbors, by the people we surround ourselves with. We are the products of our communities. It's what the Bible teaches, and believe it or not, it's what the social scientists teach us. Here's what they tell us. You see, we think you we work out for ourselves what we believe. They tell us, No. Truth is, we tend to believe whatever the people around us believe, we tend to believe whatever the people we like, the people we admire believe. Our beliefs are shaped more by our relationships, than by our reason.

You've seen it happen. If you're old enough and honest enough, you've seen it happen in you. Sometimes it's parents. So many teenagers get to a point where they are thinking, "I'm never going to be like my mom, or my dad. I hate that thing they say, or do. I'm never going to be like that." And when you are in your 20s, you still believe that myth. And then, the older you get, the more you realize how profoundly your parents shaped you, and that you are, to an enormous degree, like the persons you said you'd never be like. Do you old guys agree with that?

Or sometimes it's a church family. Some people are shaped, by God, through their church family. There are a whole lot of people who come to church and think to themselves, "My life has been changed by this church." And for some, it's true – their lives have been literally transformed. But for many others, it's an illusion. For a whole lot of people, church really doesn't make them better, it just makes them feel better. What makes the difference? Why do some people join a church family and their lives are changed; and others go to church and nothing really changes about who they are, or how they live life?

Did you know that you can go to church once or twice a month, even every week... You can come into this room, and listen to the music – maybe even enjoy it. You can listen to the preaching. You can listen to people tell stories about what God is doing in them and through them. You can eat the bread, and drink the cup. You can be comforted by all that, you can be inspired by all that, and you can walk out that door week after week after week without being significantly changed at all. Some of you guys are good at it.

And yet others are actually shaped by God, in a church family. What's the difference? You see, some people play at church, others invest in a church family. They are the one's who actually get to what we call the "one anothers." There are about 100 of these one anothers in the New Testament. They tell us how to do life with one another. You see, it's not just about me and God, it's about us. And if we blow these off, he won't honor our offerings to him in this place.

Now, I don't have time to read you all the texts, but the Bible says things like this: Honor one another, Accept one another, Bear with one another, Confess your sins to one another, Forgive one another. Guys, you can't do these one anothers if you are doing life together in this room one hour a week. Honoring each other, and accepting each other, and forgiving each other has to go way further than what we will do this morning. The Bible tells us to encourage and challenge one another. It says we are to admonish and confront and warn one another. It actually tells us to stop being fake with one another. That's actually a viable way to translate Romans 12.9. That would be cool, wouldn't it? If we could actually take off our masks with each other? We are to Bear each other's burdens, to Share our stuff with one another, to Submit to one another's needs. We can't do this stuff if our life with each other is limited to what happens in this room on Sunday mornings. It is in community that these things are lived out. It is in community that the Holy Spirit goes to work inside us and changes us. It's in doing life together that we are changed into what God made us to be. Guys, here's the deal: ordinarily God does not transform us unless we are willing to invest in community ... in his church family ... beyond an hour a week. Okay?

Now, we're just about ready to jump into James 4. You see, there are two ways to fail to be a part of a healthy church family. #1: You can just blow

church off. You can decide you are not interested, or you are too busy. Or maybe you'll come when it's convenient, or when life gets messy, or occasionally when you need a little extra help from God. But one way or another, you just blow church off. The other way to fail to be a part of a healthy Christian community is to get into one and fight. You are part of a church family, but you feud, and you bicker, and you quarrel. Either way, you fail to position yourself in a place where God can do his amazing work inside you.

So James starts chapter 4 by asking the question. He says, "What is causing the quarrels and fights among you" church people? (James 4.1) You see, they were doing it back then, too: fighting and quarreling. And then James says something 3 verses later that is incredible. He says, "You adulterers! (We're going to get back to that; the word he uses here is amazing. He says,) You adulterers, don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God." (James 4.4) Now that's hard! What's he talking about. Do you know what friendship with the world is? It's fighting, and quarreling. Do you know what makes you an enemy of God? It's fighting, and quarreling. From the context, that has to at least be part of it.

There are some powerful words in the Gospel of John. Jesus is praying, just before he dies. And he tells his Father, "I am praying ... for all who will ever believe in me ... I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one ... (why?) so that the world will believe you sent me." (John 17.20-21) Wow! Jesus says, maybe the #1 argument you have, maybe the most powerful tool you have to show the world who I am ... is the beauty and the depth of your love for each other. Maybe that's why, either through indifference, or through fighting and quarreling, this failure to build and invest in a strong Christian community is actually working against God. James says it even makes us enemies of God. Because it is trampling on the most powerful tool we have to show the world who he is. Guys, a healthy Christian community, a healthy church family, is incredibly important to you, and to them.

So why do we do it? Why do we fight and quarrel? What is it that keeps us from building and experiencing the kind of community God made us for? James gives us some clues. He says, "You want what you don't have,

so you scheme and kill to get it. (You want, so you fight.) You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. (You are jealous, so you fight) Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. ” (James 4.2-3) Do you see the idea that keeps repeating itself – “You want ... You want ... You want ... It's about me, what I like, what gives me pleasure.” Of course James is not writing this in English, he's writing this in Greek, and the word he uses for pleasure is “hedone,” which is where we get our word, “hedonism. Which means, I live for myself; I live to please myself; My comfort and my convenience are more important than yours. My needs and my likes are more important than yours.” And that's all it takes, to start a fight. Remember what we talked about last week. False wisdom is defined by, “It's all about me.” The bottom line, guys: When I make life about me, I kill community.

One of the greatest Christian teachers said, “The one principle of hell is ... I am my own.” (George MacDonald) It's all about me; I am my own. You see there are really just two ways to live: I am His, or I am my own. It's all about me; or it's all about Him. And we make that call 100 times every day in the decisions we make. The way our Creator designed life to work best was: “I am his, so My life for yours.” That's God's design. My life for God, and my life for you. Love him first, and love each other second.

This idea of ‘my life for yours’ is probably the reason you are here at all. One guys, “Every child (now I'd say ‘most’ every child, but probably all of you) received life because a mom was willing to lay down her life for her child.” Every good mama lives out, “My life for yours.” Which, by the way, is being flipped around by the abortionists, who believe a mom can say, “My life is more important than yours.” It's not; that's not God's way. And if a child is going to be raised in a God-honoring way, someone has to keep on laying down pieces of their life for that child – to nurture him, train him up, provide for him. You parents know what I'm talking about. The only reason you are here is that for about 18 years your parents kissed their lives goodbye. They kissed conveniences goodbye, they kissed more stuff goodbye, they kissed their money goodbye! They laid down their lives for you ... my life for yours.” And you see, that's the way God designed life to work for all of us. It's not about me; it's about loving him first, and loving my neighbors second – which requires, my life for yours.

And whenever someone gives a piece of their life for you, there is an appropriate response. We say, “thank you.” And when we say ‘thank you,’ we create community. Do you know what ‘thank you’ means? It means, “I acknowledge that I owe you. I admit it gratefully. Thank you!” ... Did you know that hell never hears the words, Thank you? Because those in hell live by the creed, “I am my own; it’s all about me.” So there is no community in hell, there is just ... isolation.

So James asks, “What is causing the quarrels and fights among you?” He says, it’s your “hedonism.” You think, It’s all about me, what I want, what I like. My pleasure, my comfort, my convenience, my needs are more important than yours. Which is the opposite of how God designed life to work. In fact, it’s the basic principle of hell!

And what causes the “hedonism.” James takes it a step deeper. Here’s what the real community killer is. It’s called ... pride. And James is going to talk about humility and pride. Verse 6, James says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Verse 10, he says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” Listen, humility builds community; pride kills it. You’ve seen it happen.

You’ve probably heard of Jonathan Edwards – he was a powerful preacher back in the early 1700s. He kind of shows us the differences between pride and humility. 6 fundamental differences...

- He says, Spiritual pride makes you more aware of another person’s faults than you are of your own. Humility makes you more aware of your own faults, than theirs.
- He says, Pride leads you, when you speak of someone else’s faults, to have an attitude of contempt, and disdain. But when a humble person speaks of someone else’s faults, they only do it with grief, and mercy.
- He says, Pride leads you to separate from the people you criticize, or who criticize you. Humility means you stick with people through the tough times; you don’t give up on them.

This is good stuff, guys. Can you imagine how different this place would be if we lived these out?

- He says, A proud person is dogmatic; he thinks he knows everything. He says, Proud people cannot distinguish between the big things we believe, and the little things that don't really matter that much, because everything the proud person believes is major, he thinks. It's not that way with a humble man.
- Edwards says, A proud person either loves to confront, because he likes to win; or he refuses to confront, because he hates to lose. But a humble person is willing to confront, when it's necessary, even when it's hard.
- Last one. He says, A proud person is often unhappy and sorry for himself. Do you know why? Because a proud man thinks he knows how life ought to be, and he thinks he deserves better than he is getting. But humble people say, "I'm getting a whole lot better than I deserve." That's kind of a Pinkston paraphrase of Jonathan Edwards.

So ... how are you doing? Are you proud? Or are you humble? Be honest. Are you slow to point out someone else's faults, or do you jump on them? And when you do, are you gentle? Do you stick with people through hard times, or do you quit on them when they get ornery? Are you dogmatic, do you make mountains out of molehills? When you confront, is it to build up, or to tear down? Do you whine and complain a lot? Did you know that pride kills community, and humility infuses it with beauty, and power?

So how do we turn it around? How do we move away from pride, and live out humility? Well, first of all we need to redefine it. You see, what the world calls humility, is not what God calls humility. We think humility is about being kind of shy, non-assertive, maybe even a bit timid and fearful. Guys, that's not it at all! That can't be further from the truth. Listen to what James says. He says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Therefore) So humble yourselves before (whom? ... before) God. (And with the very next breath he says,) Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4.6-7) So be humble before God, and resist Satan.

Now most of the people in our world aren't sure there really is a devil. But think about it. If you do, I hope you understand that he has enormous power. He is the most powerful, the most evil being ever created. So ... do you realize how weird James sounds to us? He says, Be humble, and

don't be afraid of the devil ... take him on, face him down. Guys, if you are not afraid of Satan, you are not afraid of anything! James is telling us: Be humble: don't be afraid of anything ... except the God who adores you.

You see, guys: In God's eyes, humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is about being less self-focused, and more God-focused. A God kind of humility is not a lack of confidence; it's a complete confidence because you know who you are before God, and you trust him. Do you know where cowardice comes from, in God's eyes? From being self-focused; it's all about me. Do you know where real courage comes from? It's about forgetting the self. You see, humility doesn't steal your confidence and your courage; it makes you strong.

Now, the rest of this section of James flows out of two huge Bible ideas. Bottom line, you will have this God honoring humility when you trust and live out these two principles. #1: God loves you unfathomably. And #2: There is what Tim Keller calls "the upside-down principle" that's at the heart of the universe.

First, the enormity of God's love for you... James uses a word in verse 4 that we rarely translate precisely. The NIV says, "You adulterous people." The NLT says, "You adulterers." The Greek actually says, "You adulteresses." It's feminine, and that's weird, because it applies to us guys too. Usually when a Greek word includes both men and women, they use the masculine form. Here it is feminine: You adulteresses, guys; you adulteresses, ladies. Do you know why? ... Because God doesn't just love us like a shepherd loves his sheep. He doesn't even just love us the way a father loves his kids. All through the Bible we are told that he loves us like a good man is supposed to love his wife. And when we sin against him, when we break our vows to him, to God it is like adultery. That is so powerful!

Do you think it's right for a man to be jealous of his wife's affections? When she starts drifting off to another guy? Yeah! We make promises to each other, promises we swear to honor till death do us part. And if we break our promises, every spouse has a right to be jealous, to be outraged! You see, we usually think of jealousy as a bad thing, filled with a lot of negative stuff, and cruelty, and pride. And some jealousy is, but not God's. James says that God "jealously longs for the spirit he has

caused to dwell in us.” (v 5) The Bible says God is jealous for love and our faithfulness like husband longs for the love and the faithfulness of his wife. Because that’s how much he loves us! And that’s what he thinks when someone or something steps in and takes his place in our affections. Guys, God loves us so powerfully!

And then there is this “upside-down principle” that is at the heart of the universe. James says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (v 6) James says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (v 10) That principle is all over the Bible. The first will be last, and the last will be first. He who finds his life will lose it, he who loses his life for my sake will find it. It’s not about being served, it’s about serving. And maybe you’re thinking, I don’t want to be last, I want to be first; I don’t want to serve, I want to be served ... Okay, then you will become more and more like Satan, and your life will become more and more like hell. Last week we said that a self-absorbed life will make you miserable, and it will make everyone around you miserable too.

You want the perfect example of the upside-down principle? Look at Jesus. The apostle Paul says, “Even Christ did not please himself ...” (Romans 15.1) No kidding! That’s one of the biggest understatements in the Bible, isn’t it? He didn’t come here to please himself! He gave up his glory, he gave up his power, he gave up his life ... for us. He took our penalty on himself.

Do you know what the penalty was? Here’s a part of it that you may never have thought through before. James says, verse 6: “God goes against the proud; God gives grace – grace -- to (whom) the humble.” You see, Jesus showed up how to do this stuff. Verse 7: He (Jesus) humbled himself before God (no kidding!), and (he) resisted the devil (like he tells us to). But when it comes to verse 8: Jesus couldn’t always live out verse 8 the way we can. James says, verse 8, “Come near to God, and he’ll come near to you.” Well, usually that worked, with Jesus. But when Jesus tried to draw near to God in the Garden, he sensed a distance. And when he was on the cross, he sensed God’s absence ... He says, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” Listen guys, What is the penalty you and I deserve whenever we live as if “my life is my own”? At the least, cosmic loneliness, separation from God. It’s the natural consequence, it’s fair. And on the cross, Jesus took that penalty for us.

Guys, Jesus experienced separation from God so we wouldn't have to. So that now, when you try to humble yourself imperfectly, and when you try to resist the devil imperfectly, and when you love each other imperfectly, and when you try to draw near to God imperfectly, God will still draw near to you, because Jesus took your place. He experienced ultimate loneliness, so we would never have to.

Guys, we were made to do life with God, and we were made to life in community. Don't blow it off. Don't destroy it through your pride. We are strongest, we are the most persuasive, life is richest when, with humility, we do this thing together for God.