

Place: Lurgan Baptist 7:11:2004

Reading: James 4:5-10

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

26. THE BATTLE FOR HUMILITY

Marian Anderson, the coloured American contralto who won world-wide acclaim as a concert soloist, didn't simply grow great she grew simply. In spite of her fame she remained the same gracious approachable lady Never one to "*put on airs.*" A model of humility. A reporter while interviewing Miss Anderson, asked her to name the greatest moment in her life. She had many great moments. The choice seemed difficult to others who were in the room that day. There was the night conductor Artier Toscanini announced, "*A voice like hers comes once in a century.*" In 1955 she became the first coloured lady to sing with the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York. Then there was the memorable time she gave a private concert at the White House for the Roosevelt's and the King and Queen of England. In 1963 she was awarded the coveted Presidential Medal of Freedom and to top it all there was that Easter Sunday in Washington D.C. when she stood beneath the Lincoln statue and sang for a crowd of 75,000 which included Cabinet Members, Supreme Court Justices, and most members of congress. *Which of these moments did she choose ?* None of them. Miss Anderson quietly told the reporter that the greatest moment of her life *was the day when she went home and told her mother she would not have to take in washing anymore to put food on the table.* Some folks go to great lengths to hide their humble origins. We often think we should mask the truth of our past lest people think less of us, *especially if our today is much more respectable than our yesterday.* But the truth is when we peel off our masks, others are not usually repelled, they are drawn closer to us. Marian Anderson's candid remark simply increases our admiration of her. The prophet Isaiah mentions this very thing as he reminds us to "*look unto the rock whence ye are hewn and to the hold of the pit whence ye are digged.*" (Is 51:1) Isaiah says, "*never forget the hold of the pit.*" What excellent advice. My before you get all enamoured with your high and mighty importance, take a backward glance at the "*hole of the pit,*" from which Christ lifted you ! It has a way of keeping us all on the same level recipients of grace. It has a way of shooting holes in our pride.

Now the Bible has much to say regarding pride. The word "*pride,*" itself occurs some 48 times in Scripture,

“ *proud*,” about 57 times, another phrase “ *lifted up his heart*,” is frequently mentioned. Now let's make no mistake about it pride is a sin and is hated by God. “ *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.*” (Prov 16:5 21:4) And it is on this subject that James offers a few home truths. *One of the problems in our churches today is that we have too many celebrities and not enough servants.* Here James makes it clear that no proud Christian is living close to the Lord. Notice in (4:6-10) he makes 3 assertions.

(1) THE HELP GOD ALWAYS REPLENISHES

“ *But He giveth more grace,*” (4:6) Do you recall the context of that statement ? In (4:5) James says, “ *The Spirit whom He has caused to dwell in us, jealously yearns for the entire devotion of the heart.*” Has the Lord got all your heart ? All of it, in its entirety ? Consecration is a difficult thing, but He giveth more grace. The word here is different from the one used in (1:11) here it means “ *help, or strength.*” James is speaking here of continuing grace. God alone can give the grace for a person to come to Christ, and God alone can give the grace for a person to continue in the Christian life. “ *But He giveth more grace.*” We can't but He can. The greater the difficulty, the greater the opportunity, the greater the weakness the more grace He gives. What is grace ? It's God's provision for our every need when we need it. Are your circumstances such this that you need His grace ? Has some dire agony wrung from your heart the cry, “ *does Jesus care ?*” Well, “ *He giveth more grace,*” and this continuing grace is,

(a) ACCORDING TO HIS NATURE:

The word “ *giveth*,” here is the present continuous tense. It is a never-ending giving. The story is told of a man who submitted a painting to a well-known exhibition, but he forgot to give the painting a title. The work was an impression of the Niagara Falls and showed the surging, seething waters pouring over the rocks. Just before the exhibition was to open, the organiser noticed that it was without a title and someone was given the responsibility of choosing one. After some thought he chose three words, “ *More to follow.*” Do you see why ? Those waters had poured over the rocks for countless years, bringing light, heat, comfort and many other benefits to multitudes of people Yet there was still more to follow and multitudes could be helped in the same way. My though Christians have drawn continuously for untold centuries on the grace of God, there is always “ *more to follow.*” “ *He giveth more grace.*” Given not only fully and freely, but continuously and that is completely according to the nature of “ the giving God.”

But this continuing grace is:

(b) ACCORDING TO OUR NEED:

The Amplified Bible puts (Heb 4:16) like this, “ *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in good time for every need appropriate help and well-timed help coming just when we need it.* ” Have no fear, burdened believer. “ *He giveth more grace.* ” His supply will match your need. Never too much, never too little. Perfectly timed and perfectly adequate. For daily need there is daily grace. For sudden need there is sudden grace. For overwhelming need there is overwhelming grace. God’s grace is given wonderfully, but not wastefully, freely but not foolishly, bountifully, but not blindly. My God is adequate for every need you have. Divine grace in all its freshness, fullness and freeness is yours. For “ *He giveth more grace.* ” (1)

(2) THE HAUGHTY GOD ALWAYS RESISTS

“ *Wherefore He saith,* ” or other translations have it, “ *It saith.* ” That is the Scriptures saith. But which Scripture says this. Probably James is referring to (Prov 3:34) which says, “ *Surely He scorneth the scorers, but He giveth grace unto the humble.* ” (1 Pet 5:5) Now this word “ *resist,* ” is an interesting one. It means (antitasso) “ *to arrange against.* ” It’s a military term. How wonderful to have the hosts of God encamped around you, but just imagine what it must mean to have the God of Hosts arranged against you. Why such severe action ? Because of the nature of pride. Do you recall that Satan fell because of his pride ? (Is 14:12-14 Lk 10:18) As Milton put it, he preferred to “ *reign in hell than serve in heaven.* ” Satan suffered from “ *I,* ” trouble. The middle letter of pride is “ *I,* ” just as “ *I,* ” is the middle letter of sin. The word for pride means “ *one who shows himself above other people.* ” (huperephanos) Do you know what pride does ? It robs God of the glory due to Him. Watchman Nee that remarkable man of God once wrote, “ *The Christ we manifest is too small because in ourselves we have grown too big. May God forgive us.* ” “ *God resisteth the proud.* ” How does God resist the proud ? Well,

(a) GOD GIVES THEM UP:

There is a very illuminating incident during the trials Christ faced immediately

before His crucifixion. Do you recall that Christ was questioned by Herod ? We read this, “ *Then he questioned Him in many words, But He answered Him nothing.* ” (Lk 23:8-9) Now Herod was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, and of his traits was pride. But in response to the pride of Herod, Christ refused to speak.

Do you recall what Paul says in

(Rom Ch 1) ? Three times God we discover that God acted in a certain way to certain people. We read, “ *God also gave them up,* ” (Rom 1:24) “ *God gave them up,* ”

(1:26) “ *God gave them over.* ” (1:28) Who were these people ? Those who were marked by pride. (1:30) Unsaved don't you fool about with God, because God could give you up, and if that happens you're lost eternally ! My We should tremble lest we should live our lives in such a way that we incur God's terrible silence. (a)

(b) GOD BRINGS THEM DOWN

Do you remember the story of King Uzziah ?

(2 Chron 26:5) A story of success, prosperity, until he allowed pride to overcome him. We read, “ *But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord His God and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense.* ” He was a king yet he took on himself the function of a priest, strictly reserved for the Levites.

(Num 18: 6-7) The result was not only that he was turned out of the sanctuary, but that leprosy struck him and he could not even live in his own palace. His pride was the flame that turned the mighty Uzziah's success to ashes. My like Uzziah has God blessed you ? Financially ? Domestically ? Industrially ? Personally ? Be careful for do you know what God does ? He resists the proud by ruining their success. (a) (b)

(c) GOD TAKES THEM AWAY:

Belshazzar was another king, magnificence in his splendour and obscene in his arrogance. Daniel reminded him that although his father Nebuchadnezzar had been a mighty man, “ *when his heart was lifted up and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne and they took his glory from him.* ”

(Dan 5:20) But even this was not a deterrent to Belshazzar. He went on his pride but for him literally the writing was on the wall, and in the midst of his revelling he was violently put to death. You see, the Lord has power to give, and the Lord has power to take away and He does both. None of our positions are so secure that God cannot end them. My if we have a position in business, in social life, in

business life, in the church or elsewhere, we should praise God for it and honour God in it. For if we will not be humbled, then we may have to be humiliated. “*For though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off.*” (Ps 138:6) The sin of pride ! Are you guilty of the very thing that God hates ? (Prov 21:4)

***“ Save me from myself, my Father
From each subtle form of pride
Lead now with Christ to Calvary
Show me “ I,” with Him have died.”***

(3) THE HUMBLE GOD ALWAYS REWARDS

James says “ *God resisteth grace unto the humble.* ” Its not enough for James to tell us about the abundance of grace (4:6) he tells how to obtain it, its God’s gift to the humble. My if we get rid of proud self-exaltation, then God will give us grace. Did you notice the same truth in (4:10) You see (4:6) and (4:10) are like brackets and by means of commands in the intervening verses James shows the details of a humble walk with God. It is marked by:

(a) DECISIVENESS:

Two things are brought together in (4:7) The word “ *submit,* ” means “ *to take rank under.* ” It was a military term speaking of someone getting into his proper rank. We are to submit ourselves to His orders and commands. Someone wrote to Emily Post on one occasion and asked “ *What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House but has a previous engagement.* ” She replied “ *An invitation to dine at the White House is a command, and it automatically cancels any other engagements.* ” My have you put yourself under the Lordship of Christ ? Now this is not some sort of Christian passivity. James knows nothing of a submission to the Lord that is not at the same time a resistance to the Devil. That word “ *resist,* ” means “ *to take a stand against.* ” In many cases we have submitted to the Devil and resisted God. I heard the story of how during a church service the devil walked in and marched down to the front of the church.

Everyone started screaming and running for the doors. Soon the building was empty except for one old gentleman. He sat calmly in his pew, seemingly oblivious to the fact that the enemy of souls was in his presence. Satan looked at him and said, “ *Do you know who I am ?* ” The old man replied, “ *Yep, sure do.* ” Satan then asked, “ *Aren’t you afraid of me ?* ” “ *Nope, sure ain’t,* ” said the man. The Devil

then said, “ *Don’t you know that I could cause you profound, horrifying agony for all eternity ?*” “ *Yep,*” replied the old man.

“ *Then why aren’t you afraid,*” asked the devil. The old man calmly replied, “ *Been married to your sister for over 48 years.*” We may not be married to the devil’s sister, but we are in constant battle with him. There was a little old lady who never spoke ill of anyone. If she said anything about anyone, it was always good. A friend said to her one day, “ *I believe you would say something good even about the devil.*” “ *Well,*” she said “ *you certainly do have to admire his persistence.*” My the devil is persistent, he will keep coming back, but each time we take a stand against him he will flee. Be decisive.

(b) NEARNESS:

Look at the Command, “ *draw nigh to God,*” look at the Promise, “ *And He will draw nigh to you.*” Are you no longer conscious of the Lord’s presence ? Are you no longer aware of His nearness ? Is it because you are not drawing near ? The tendency in many of us is to reverse this order. We think how easy it would be to have a daily time with the Lord, if only we had a more vivid sense of His presence. In other words, we want the promise to come before the command. Yet part of the conflict to which James calls us is this central battle for regularity and discipline in Bible Study, prayer, private and public worship, attendance at the Lord’s Table, and all the other ways by which we may draw near to Him. “ Nearness.”

Charles Spurgeon in one of his sermons made the statement that he was never out of vital contact with God for more than ten minutes. Someone asked G. Campbell Morgan how real the Lord was to him. Do you know what he replied “ *As real as the skin on my hands.*” Do you want to know how deep your commitment is to the Lord ? How much time do you spend with Him ? (a) (b)

(c) CLEANLINESS:

There is to be a cleansing of our hands and a purifying of our hearts. The word “ *cleanse,*” means “ *to wash,*” it’s the word that was used to describe the ceremonial cleansing of the priests. Before they were allowed to offer the sacrifices they washed their hands. The washing of the hands was a figurative act of being cleansed of any sinful acts. What about this question of sin in our lives ? So many of us are like the little girl who had been to a party and on her return was asked by her Mummy if she had been a good girl. She replied,

“ *Mummy I wasn’t good and I wasn’t naughty I was just comfy.*” Does that not sum up perfectly our condition before the Lord ? Comfiness, lukewarmness, a condition that deadens sensibility to sin ! James is speaking here of a purity that touches the

hand and the heart, *the outer life and the inner life, the deeds and the thoughts.*

Did you notice who is to be the agent of this cleansing ? This is not the work of *the Holy Spirit but the work of the energised believer.* “ *Cleanse your hands purify your hearts,* ” “ *double minded,* ” means “ a divided heart.” Its you trying to hold on to the world with one hand and the things of God with the other. Its trying to run with the hare and hunt with the hound at the same time. Is that you ? Are your hands dirty ? Is your heart divided ? Or are you weeding out the sin and planting in the Word of God. (1:21) Are you longing for a closer walk with God ? Well, have you got the marks ? A,B,C

(d) BROKENNESS:

The word “ *afflicted,* ” speaks of an inward feeling of misery when we sin. (Rom 7:24) “ *mourn,* ” speaks of the sadness our sin should cause and “ *weep,* ” speaks of tears that reveals our sadness. One word sums it up !

Brokenness ! A deep sense of sorrow at our own personal sin. Now lets be honest. When did we last shed tears over our own sin ? Your own failure ? Your lukewarmness of heart ? Your own divided affections ?

Fred Wood one of the founders of the Young Life Campaign was walking in a town one day with his brother Arthur when they were engulfed by a crowd of young people coming in the opposite direction. When they got through the crowd Arthur saw that they were tears in his brothers eyes. “ *Why are you crying ?* ” Fred hung his head and said, “ *They don't know my Saviour.* ”

When did you last weep over anyone who did not know your Saviour ? When did you last weep with concern over someone in your family, someone with whom you work, someone with whom you mix socially, someone who is away from the Lord and apart from the grace of God will spend eternity in hell ? “ *Oh for a closer walk with God,* ” are these your sentiments ? Well, then are you willing to be decisive, to draw near, to be pure, to be broken. Are you saying, “ *Why these things are impossible for me.* ” That's true, but then “ *He giveth more grace.* ” “ *Continuing grace.* ” “ *Tis grace that brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home.* ” For as Dr. R.W. Dale put it, “ *the loftier His commands the larger His bounty.* ” “ *He giveth more grace.* ” Do you know what that will mean for you in this incoming week ? It will mean that the Lord will enable you to walk, to worship, to work, to witness and to withstand all the pressures, and problems of life. Will you take this promise with you ? “ *He giveth more grace,* ” and His grace is sufficient for thee.

