**Just Submit**

James 4:10-17

Ok, show of hands: who really LOVES to submit?

***Submission is hard for any human*** because it means placing yourself under the authority of another. But submission is especially hard for us modern Americans because our whole history is one of revolution - standing up to the great British Empire and throwing off the oppressive authority of the King.

Why do we celebrate the Boston Tea Party? What an act of defiance! What a childish prank! But it resonated throughout the colonies because resentment was growing against the increasingly restrictive yoke of King George.

***So we had a revolution.*** Then the South tried to have a revolution to throw off the yoke of Yankee oppression up north. It very nearly worked. Then women had to get organized and demand the right to vote. Then labor had to get organized to demand fair compensation and working conditions. Then we had to go help the Brits defeat the oppression of Nazi Germany. Then African Americans had to get organized and demand equal rights in our “land of the free.”

These are ***defining moments in our history*** - and they are deeply embedded in us. We don’t submit. We stand up and fight. “I’m gonna fight. For the right. To…” See? It’s in our music too. What is heavy metal after all? Defiance. Shaking your fist at the man.

In other cultures, at other times in history, submission has been valued and required. People bow to each other. They take off their shoes. They kneel before beloved rulers.

Can you imagine? It’s just not how we roll.

So let’s just recognize that **submission is going to be hard for us**. But in the Kingdom of God, it is not a representative democracy where everyone gets a vote. ***It’s a Theocracy*** with One King, One Judge, One Law. And to get into this kingdom you have to bow, you have to submit, you have to surrender. You are not a citizen of the republic of heaven. You are a SUBJECT of the King in the Kingdom of heaven. We either submit to and serve the King or we are outsiders, interlopers, rogues, renegades and traitors.

We concluded last week with this verse and we start today with it again:

“Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.” James 4:10

What a beautiful **one verse summary of Christianity**. If you want to get into the kingdom of God you first have to humble yourself. You can’t get in by exalting yourself and listing all of your wonderful qualities. It doesn’t work to build your resume and go into the interview with confidence to point out your strengths and find creative ways to downplay your weaknesses. The only way in is through a low door that you enter on your knees. HUMBLE yourselves.

***Confess your sins. Repent.*** Turn from your sins. Call on Jesus to save you. Recognize you cannot save yourself. Weep, mourn and wail. Turn your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. “Blessed are the poor in Spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.” Jesus did not come to call the righteous but SINNERS to repentance.

And when a sinner repents, ***God immediately begins to exalt you.*** At the moment of salvation, Jesus takes your sin from you and places it upon His own body on the cross. He cleans you inside and out and then baptizes you in His Holy Spirit forever. You are dressed in the righteousness of Jesus and filled with His Spirit, who begins right away to grow His fruit in you - of love, joy, peace, patience and the rest. Jesus promises to walk with you for the rest of your life, to love you and guide you and help you and comfort you through His own Spirit. And Jesus promises to finish this work one day, completely shaping you into HIS image of glorious perfection. When we see Him face to face we will be like Him! “Those he called he also justified, those he justified he also GLORIFIED.”

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

***It means SUBMIT.*** That’s how you get into the kingdom, and it’s how you live in the kingdom. Here in James 4, James is going to show us **two sins to avoid** because instead of humbling ourselves they cause is to exalt ourselves. Judging other people exalts you over those people. And boasting about your plans exalts you over your own life and this world instead of the kingdom. First sin to avoid:

Do not **Judge:** Exalting yourself over people

“Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.” James 4:11

Again James returns to the power and ***importance of our WORDS***. He spent most of chapter three on this topic. Your words not only reveal who you are they shape who you become. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and the one who loves to talk with reap the consequences.”

So don’t speak evil against a brother or sister in the Lord. This was probably the ***first letter*** written in the New Testament - in the early 40s AD. 10 years or less after the resurrection. Already there are dangers and threats to the fledgling church - and they are mainly from WITHIN, not from without. ***The dangers of relational conflict and infighting.***

**Paul would go on to write a LOT about unity** and peace within the church. This means that CONFLICT was more the norm. So the early church had to figure out how to get along. And James cuts to the root here. Speaking evil of another person is not just about your words - it’s about your heart and what it reveals about your heart is PRIDE. By speaking ill of another person you are tearing them down in order to build yourself up.

Basic teenage / mean-girls math. For my status to go up, your status must go down. I exalt myself by humbling you, making fun of you, speaking evil of you.

Notice the way James argues here. By speaking evil of another believer what ***we are actually doing is judging God’s Law.*** How is that? What’s the logic here? Look at verse 12.

Do not **Judge:** Exalting yourself over people

“The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law… But who are you to ***judge your neighbor***?” James 4:11-12

There’s the kick to the shins. ***JUDGE your neighbor***. What are we supposed to do to our neighbor? Oh yeah - LOVE your neighbor as yourself. Don’t judge. Love. The Royal Law - the King’s Law is the law of love. Love God with all you are and you will increasingly share His love with the people around you. God is love. The closer we are to God the more we will live out His love.

Do not **Judge:** Exalting yourself over people

* By Judging others, you **Condemn** God’s Law

“The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law… But who are you to ***judge your neighbor***?” James 4:11-12

In the moment when you’re mad at someone, when they have hurt your feelings or gotten in the way of your agenda it FEELS like you are speaking for what is RIGHT. But often ***what feels like righteous indignation is just selfish indignation*** fueled by the pride that thinks we always get it right.

This verse covers both **gossip and slander**. Gossip is speaking evil of someone else that is TRUE. Slander is speaking evil of someone else that is not true. Do you see the point? It doesn’t matter if it’s true. That’s just gossip then - speaking evil of another person. That’s no better than making up a rumor and spreading it.

Any time we speak evil of another person do you see what we are doing? We are exalting ourselves over another person, but also over God’s Law. ***You are saying that YOU know better than God.*** Your way is better than His. You are the one who KNOWS justice and you are the one who can get justice by tearing down some other person.

Just submit. James 4:7 - “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

When we gossip and slander and make fun and tear down other people what is really happening is we are refusing to submit to God and His law. And instead of resisting the devil we are playing right into his hand. ***What does the devil want in the church?*** Conflict. Division. Mistrust. Disrespect. Lack of love. Bitterness. Resentment. Anger. Selfishness. Pride.

What does God want in the church? Love. Forgiveness. Grace. Mercy. Patience. Peace. Humility. Submission. Did I say love?

Do not **Judge:** Exalting yourself over people

* God commands us to **Love** and **Forgive** one another

“But if you judge the law you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge; he who is able to save and to destroy.” James 4:11-12

***What is our proper relationship to God’s law?*** Are we to exalt ourselves OVER the Law by ignoring it or disobeying it? Or are we to place ourselves UNDER the Law by believing and obeying it? To submit is to place ourselves UNDER God and His Law.

Take your Bible or your phone if that’s where your Bible is. ***Stand up and place your Bible over your head.*** Raise it up there. Brothers and sisters, we stand UNDER the authority of the Word of God. We joyfully submit to God and His Word as people of the Book. We submit, recognizing that God knows better than we do and His Word shows us His character, His ways and His LAW. Ok have a seat.

***Are we DOERS of the word***, or hearers only, deceiving ourselves? Are we like the wise man who hears the words of Jesus and puts them into practice or like the fool who hears but does not do them? Are we UNDER the authority of God’s Word or are we arrogantly placing ourselves OVER His Word as judges of it?

Me? I don’t need to love my neighbor. In this case I am totally justified to judge my neighbor.

There is only One Lawgiver and Judge. One. His name is Jesus. ***He gave the Law*** through His Spirit to Moses and the prophets. Then He came to clarify and fulfill the Law through His own teachings, His own example, His life and death and resurrection.

Jesus is the One who can save and also who can destroy. Don’t fear mere mortals who can only harm or kill your body. Fear the One who has the authority to destroy your soul and body in the eternal torment of hell. Yes, I tell you - fear Him.

***Do we tremble before the holy God of heaven*** who demands that we be perfect as He is perfect?

Do we bow in reverent awe before our jealous God who is a consuming fire?

Do we recognize that the Law of God is not this flexible, mushy, pushover thing that we can ignore or adjust at our pleasure? No God’s Law is an expression of His unchangeable character which is holy, righteous, pure, just, good and Almighty.

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. The first application of this humility is to our relationships. Don’t speak evil of others and place yourself above them. Love your neighbor. ***Forgive as you have been forgiven.***

If we don’t forgive each other, Jesus explicitly states that we ourselves will not be forgiven. We are those wicked servants who have been forgiven billions of dollars in debt. Yet we turn around and choke a brother or sister who owes us five bucks. Pay me what you owe me! Do they owe you a few dollars? Sure. But how much have you been forgiven by the Lord? How much grace have you received? What is that little debt compared to the lifetime of sin Jesus forgave you for?

Have mercy on me, a sinner!

Lord we recognize that we are no better than ANYONE else. Forgive us for failing to love our neighbors but instead for judging them and placing ourselves over them and arrogantly exalting ourselves above you and your Law. Humble us before you and remind us how much we have been forgiven so that we will be quick to forgive, quick to love, slow to anger, slow to speak. Help us to use our words to build up and not to tear down. Help us to speak life and love to one another. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Ok, that’s the first sin to avoid: judging others and speaking evil of them. Here is the second sin to avoid:

Do not **Boast:** Exalting yourself in life

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.’” James 4:13

This is a tough one, right? ***Isn’t this EXACTLY how we organize our lives?*** We make plans for the day, the week, the year and the 10-year. Come on. Don’t raise your hand, but how many of us have a five-year plan? A 10-year plan? You do.

Ok, James is not saying that planners are wicked, sinful, selfish worldly people. If you’re a J on the Meyers Briggs - a structured, organized, disciplined planner - this is not saying you are a messed up person and the flexible, spontaneous otters among us are so much better than you hard working, uptight beavers. I kind of wish that’s what he was saying but no. Alas.

Ok, **the problem is not making plans.** Proverbs calls us to wise planning. God gave Moses a very structured plan for the tabernacle and the administration of God’s people. Joshua organized the Israelites by tribe as they marched around Jericho and later apportioned the land. Jesus at the end of his earthly life said, “Ok, you better go get a sword.” They said, “Here, we already have two.” He replied, “Ok, that’s enough.”

So ***think of your planner like one of those two swords*** Jesus mentioned. He wasn’t suddenly changing his whole approach and saying, “Ok, now you all go overthrow Rome.” No. But he was saying, “Don’t be fools. You need to be a little practical and don’t just go get killed by bandits.” The day may come that you need to defend yourself. Don’t worry about that day, but don’t just throw up your hands and let them run you through.

The problem is not making plans. ***The problem is what our plans reveal about our HEARTS.*** Jesus overtly said, “Don’t worry about TOMORROW.” So part of the problem with this line of thinking is when we obsess about tomorrow and the day after and the day after that and the month after that and the year after that. And what do we have? WORRY.

That’s what Jesus overtly warned us not to do. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Don’t get all worked up about the future IN THIS WORLD. ***If you must dwell on the future, meditate on ETERNITY.*** Think about the new heaven and the new earth when all sin and disease and evil and suffering will be gone and we will RULE with Jesus forever. Think of the places you can explore, the people you can spend time with, the wonders you can build. All for Jesus! All with Jesus right there.

But that’s not what we do, is it? ***We don’t obsess about eternity, we obsess about our finances*** and paying the bills and preparing for that next big expense. We fixate on our comforts, our pleasures and desires - that next big vacation, that next fun purchase, that next thing the kids “really really need.” Come on. In no universe is a gaming system or tablet or phone a “Need.” Turn the page to James 5 and feel the prophetic rebuke coming your way next week about wealth.

***That passage is so revealing of us*** - so exposing of how we have fattened ourselves in the day of slaughter. We have lived our lives in luxury and self indulgence while the world goes to hell around us.

Do not **Boast:** Exalting yourself in life

* By investing mainly in this world, you risk your **Eternal** rewards

“Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring! What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” James 4:14

***Think about the last year of your life.*** To what extent did you store up treasure in HEAVEN and to what extent did you labor and save to store up treasure right here in this life on earth? Did you really live for God’s kingdom or for YOUR kingdom?

**The words of Jesus** are just echoing off the phrases here.

* Will you gain the whole world and forfeit your soul?
* Will you store up piles of treasure here on earth that moth and rust will just consume and thieves will take and waste?
* Will you see the pearl of great price - Jesus - the treasure in the field - and walk past it because you have fields of your own to plow, you have employees to think about.
* You have BIGGER BARNS you have to build because you are preparing for…
* TOMORROW.

Let me say something very clearly here. **Dave Ramsey is not the Messiah**. Dave Ramsey is not the Lawgiver and Judge. When you die and stand before the Judge, his name will not be Dave. It will be Jesus.

***Should you have an emergency fund?*** Probably. Should it be three full months of income? Probably not. Certainly not if you’re making six figures.

***Should you save up for retirement?*** Probably. Should it be millions and millions and millions of dollars? Probably not. Certainly not if you give practically nothing to the church and to charity and to missions.

Remember what Jesus said about that guy who made big plans for his next harvest and the one after that, so he built bigger barns with a view to his own comfort and many years he could sit back and relax.

“You fool. This night your life is required of you. Now who will enjoy all the comforts you planned for yourself?”

You fool.

Me fool.

What is your life? ***Teach us, Lord, to number our days*** that we might gain a heart of wisdom. We are a morning mist that is about to vanish. A few more breaths and you’ll be on a ventilator. A few more steps and you’ll be using a walker. A few more hours and you’ll be face up in a casket with your hands folded over your chest.

“You can’t take anything with you. But you can send things on ahead.”

**You can store up treasure in heaven NOW**. But not by keeping it. Only by giving it away.

Our lives are filled with wood, hay and straw. Your car - a flimsy stick. Your house - a pile of hay. Your body - decaying straw. Your reputation, your brand, your NAME - anything that exalts YOU - is rubbish, refuse, trash.

Remember what Paul said? Compared to knowing Jesus and serving His kingdom ***everything he had achieved was TRASH.*** It was garbage. And Saul the Pharisee had achieved everything - he had already gained the whole world in terms of religious studies and professional advancement. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees.

***But it was all for HIMSELF.*** It was all self-exaltation. It was all for his own name, his own advancement. So that’s not even wood, hay and straw. That’s dog s—-tuff.

And he joyfully cast it all aside for the joy of knowing Jesus. He found the pearl of great price and joyfully sold everything he had to get it.

Do not **Boast:** Exalting yourself in life

* God calls us to **Trust** Him and **Serve** His Kingdom purposes

“Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’” James 4:15

***Planning is not the problem - self-exaltation is.*** Trusting in yourself, serving yourself, living for this world. Those are the problems. And the symptom of the disease of self-exaltation is BOASTING.

Do you hear this in your words or in the whispers of your mind?

***“Look at this great Babylon I have built by my great wisdom and might?”***

Do those thoughts bounce around in you as you look at your house, your family, your career, your writings?

Look at this great Babylon that I HAVE BUILT.

Do you remember who said that? Nebuchadnezzar.

Do you remember what happened as soon as those words had left his lips? He was struck mute for seven years and crawled around like a beast of the field eating grass like a wild donkey.

Look at this great Babylon that I have built.

Nebuchadnezzar was warned exactly one year before that to give glory and honor to God alone. James is warning us in the same way right now.

Do not **Boast:** Exalting yourself in life

* God calls us to **Trust** Him and **Serve** His Kingdom purposes

“As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” James 4:16

Don’t judge other people and speak evil against them. And don’t boast about yourself and your own life about ***the great Babylon that you have built***. Because if you have built something for your own name and your own comfort and your own glory - that’s what it is BABYLON. The kingdom of man. All such boasting is evil.

Do not **Boast:** Exalting yourself in life

* God calls us to **Trust** Him and **Serve** His Kingdom purposes

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” James 4:17

Here is the call of God: to trust Him to the point that we actually SERVE HIM. Jesus connects the two things very clearly in Matthew 6. Don’t be anxious about your life - what you will eat or drink or wear. Instead, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, his justice, his love, his shalom on earth.

Don’t just say you believe in Jesus, serve Jesus. Don’t be a hearer of the word only, deceiving yourself, DO what the Bible says. Love God. Love your neighbor.

***Do you know the right thing to do?*** I know that you do because the Holy Spirit has promised to lead us into all truth and remind us over everything Jesus taught. So you know already who God is calling you to love and serve. How you can sacrifice and what you can give.

You already know who you need to call after the service today to apologize and ask forgiveness. You’ve spoken evil of them, whether it was true or not. You need to make it right.

Here is our summary.

Do not **Judge:** Exalting yourself over people

* By judging others, you **Condemn** God’s Law
* God commands us to **Love** and **Forgive** one another

Do not **Boast:** Exalting yourself in life

* By investing mainly in this world, you risk your **Eternal** rewards
* God calls us to **Trust** Him and **Serve** His Kingdom purposes

Two sins to avoid - are sins of self-exaltation. Don’t exalt yourself over another person by judging them and speaking evil of them. LOVE your neighbor as you love yourself. Use words that build up, never tear down.

And don’t exalt yourself over life. Don’t boast about the great Babylon you have built.

Let’s recognize that we are all rebels and revolutionaries. ***We don’t like to submit.*** We like to stand up and fight. We like to assert ourselves. We don’t like to be under any authority but rather to BE the authority - to make our own rules. But it can’t be that way in the kingdom. We are servants of the King. We are under His sovereign rule. We call Him Master or we kid ourselves.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Draw near to Him. Purify your hearts. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Do the next right thing.

Let’s pray.