

# James 4 - Backsliding Prevention by Recovery

by Richard Owen Roberts

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and humility, and warns of the consequences of ignoring God's justice and holiness.*

**Duration:** 1:46:46

**Scripture:** Ecclesiastes 3:4, James 4:4, James 4:7-10

**Topics:** "Spiritual Renewal", "Repentance"

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## Description

This sermon based on James chapter 4 emphasizes the importance of submitting to God, resisting the devil, drawing near to God, cleansing hands and purifying hearts, mourning over sin, and humbling oneself in God's presence. It highlights the need to make a clear choice between loving God or the world, and the significance of seeking God continually to avoid backsliding and experience divine visitation.

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## Transcript

James chapter 4. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source of your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and you 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.

You ask and you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 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. Or do you think that the scripture speaks to no purpose? He jealously desires the spirit which he has made to dwell in us, but he gives a greater grace.

Therefore, it says, God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit, therefore, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and he will exalt you. 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. 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? Come now, you who say today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

Instead, you ought to say if the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. May God add his blessings to the reading, hearing, and in a few moments to the preaching of this passage as well. Let's stand together and sing majestic sweetness sits enthroned.

Certainly one of the clearest evidences of the need of revival in the American church and doubtless in other parts of the world as well is the decline of the prayer meeting in so many churches. But I want to ask you a question. Have you ever weighed carefully why prayer meetings are in decline? Be interesting to just turn this into a back and forth and hear your statements as to why you think the prayer meeting is in decline.

I don't think anybody's ever gathered statistics and carefully evaluated this matter, but we know that in a general sense, if the church has 10,000 in attendance on a Sunday, and that's not uncommon. I've preached in a number myself much larger than that, and of course, most of that size wouldn't be willing to listen to me under any circumstance. But a church of 10,000 Sunday morning, how many are they likely to have in prayer meeting if they have a prayer meeting at all? I was giving a series of meetings in one of the Christian colleges a while back, and they were daytime meetings and some evening meetings, but the arrangers knew that I was not scheduled to speak on the Wednesday night, and they asked if I would be willing to speak in one of the churches of the area on Wednesday night at the prayer meeting, and of course, I was delighted to do so.

Well, someone drove me there, and when we drove onto the church grounds, there was this huge facility and vast parking lots with huge numbers of cars, and I was getting quite perked up and thinking, well, this is a better opportunity even than I thought, and they led me to this very small room and told me that that's where the prayer meeting would be, and maybe 20 elderly people came. One of them led it, and I asked, where are the pastors? Oh, the pastors never come to prayer meeting, so they had basketball practice and choir practice and all kinds of activities. I don't need prayer when you're so inventive and so capable of drawing crowds, and I didn't feel very good about it, not that I was grieved by the people who were there, but immensely grieved by the many who weren't.

I asked you, have you ever weighed the question, why is the prayer meeting in decline? 10,000 on Sunday, 20 in the prayer meeting. No, I don't think that this is precise, but I think you could accurately say, for the most part, the bigger the church, the lower the percentage of the people in the prayer meeting. If there is one at all in a typical church that has still carried on the prayer meeting, the ratio would be something like this.

If there are 1,000 Sunday morning, there are 100 Sunday night. In the unlikely event, they still have a Sunday night meeting, and then 10 or 20 in the prayer meeting. I'm asking you, have you thought why this decline is so rampant in the church? I don't think that we ought to pass over staggering things without

thought.

I think we ought to have some explanation of what's taking place. To assist you in your thinking in that regard, I want to read a very small portion. I won't tell you where it's from.

I'm going to ask you, after I've read it, to tell me where it's from. Oh, Lord, God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry with the prayers of thy people? Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears, and thou hast made them to drink tears in large measure. Where have I read from? Yes, Psalm 80.

Somewhere along the line, yesterday or today, I suggested some passages that might be carefully looked at. Psalm 80 was one of those. Let's take a bit of time now at the beginning of this gathering to examine the words I have just read.

Let me repeat. This is Psalm 80, verses 4 and 5. Oh, Lord, God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry with the prayer of thy people? First, let me ask you, are you alert to the fact that prayer can and does anger God? Now, I listen to some people speak, and they say, God always hears and answers prayer. That's quite a nice notion, isn't it? But is it a valid notion? Is there any biblical basis for that kind of thinking? Well, we know perfectly well that God himself said, if you regard iniquity in your heart, I will not hear you.

So, right off, we know that that is a statement that is a lie and not a statement of truth. God does not always hear and answer prayer. He's certainly not going to answer what he has refused to hear.

But now, in this 80th Psalm, we have read a question. How long will you be angry with the prayer of thy people? And I want to ask you, what kind of prayer, not only is guaranteed God will not answer, at least not in the way wanted, but what kind of prayer will actually anger God? Have you thought about that? Well, I know that this is not the normal setting for the preacher to be asking questions. So, you're hardly used to responding in evening gatherings of this sort.

But I'm really asking not so much for your answer as to provoke your thinking. What kind of prayers anger God? And anger him to such an extent that the following words are appropriate. Thou has fed them with the bread of tears.

Thou has made them to drink tears in large measure. Now, again, another question for you to think about. Direct your focus now not to your immediate family, but to your extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc.

And let me ask you this. In your own personal extended family, do you have any cause for tears? Honestly, I don't know a single honest family that speaks the truth. But what if they were talking about it would say, we've got a lot of tears in our family.

I had very godly parents, and that was of incredible blessedness to me. I have one brother and two sisters, and all of them are genuine believers. But I have an assortment of nieces and nephews who are a perpetual source of tears.

I don't think it's speculative to say that this matter that we're looking at at the moment is not some irrelevant issue from the past, but indeed it's a very vital issue of the moment. So I come back then to the earlier question. What kind of prayer so angers God that instead of sending what is asked for, he sends tears to drink in large measure? And I remind you of what I just said.

We know that this is happening in our day because so many honest families are acknowledging the cause of tears in their own family. I have a niece, a lovely girl in many ways, but she was raped by her brother, married three times, loaded with difficulty. We had a family reunion while my parents were still alive.

One of my sisters is married to a man of above average means, and he has an estate in New York, and a large tent was rented. And so the family reunion, we were all able to eat together under the tent. But on the Saturday night of that reunion, some of the believing young people came up to me, oh probably along about 10 in the evening, and they said, Uncle Dick, what are we doing by way of church in the morning? Well I said, you understand that I'm the younger brother, and I'm not in charge, and I didn't make the arrangements, but I've been led to believe that my parents have requested that we go together to their church in the morning.

And they said, oh Uncle Dick, couldn't we have a meeting here under the tent? Well I said, I told you, I'm not in charge. Well you could preach, couldn't you? We know you could, but I'm not in charge. Well what should we do? I said, go ask my elder brother.

So they traipsed off and found him, and said, Uncle Earl, could we have a meeting under the tent in the morning? And he looked at them, and he said, well now listen, well it's true that I'm a preacher. I'm not a drop of the hat kind of a preacher. I couldn't possibly prepare.

But if you went and talked to my brother, he can always preach at the drop of a hat. So with great smiles they came back and said, Uncle Earl approves, and you're supposed to preach. Well obviously I didn't have a lot of time to pray and think, not at that hour of the night, but enough time to say, Lord, what should I do? And I felt clearly I should speak about that verse Brother John made reference to this afternoon, Psalm 73, at the end.

The nearness of God is my God. And I opened up the Psalm, explained its setting, and then said, let me describe to you how some in our family have found the nearness of God to be our good. I described some of the grievous situations my parents had been in, but how the nearness of God had been so great a help.

I described the time when my brother had been a missionary in Nigeria. He was on the battlefield during that Biafra conflict, ministering to the troops. And his wife and three of his sons went with one of the natives driving to the airport in Lagos to pick up a missionary family returning to Nigeria.

And somehow this driver veered across the highway and plowed into one of these big lorries. Two sons were killed instantly, and the wife and the third son dumped on the floor in a hospital in Lagos and left to die. But the Shell Oil Company learned of this, sent men to the front lines to find my brother, brought him back, put them in a corporate airplane, flew them to London where they received medical treatment.

And both the wife, who was somewhat crippled, and the son, who recovered fully, lived. And how the nearness of God had carried them through. Well, I'll not repeat the sermon, just trying to give you a feel for it.

Well, afterward, this niece stepped up to me, tears streaming down her face. And I looked at her with great compassion. And I said to her, calling her by her name, isn't it time for you to know the nearness of God as your God? And she burst into an awful roar of tears.

And she gasped out, oh, Uncle Dick, I wish I could. And I said, why don't you come to Chicago? Spend a few days with us. Oh, you wouldn't want me? Now, listen here.

Did I not just ask you to come? Oh, yes. But you wouldn't want me? Oh, but I said, we would. We would cherish it if you would come.

And she did. And she found the nearness of God was her God. Radically transformed.

But it doesn't always go that way. Some of you are probably carrying on your own heart now the great load of an unsaved child or grandchild. And I'm asking you, why does the Lord, our God, the God of loving kindness, the God of tender mercies, why are there occasions when instead of answering our prayers in the way that we are longing for him to do, he sends us tears to drink in great nature? Now, this is a huge question.

And we haven't got but a couple of hours tonight. And it would be quite grievous to keep you here past midnight dealing with this subject. But at least I can give you a little taste of the incredible truth that's involved in this important matter.

God is a just God. And the justice of God requires him to act just. Now, we don't really have any near and adequate sense of justice because we live in a nation that has so thoroughly corrupted the issue of justice that it's hard to push aside all the grievous things we know about the court system of America and come to grips with the reality of God's justice.

But now, one thing you can certainly agree with without any question, God is never late in his administration of justice. The timeliness of God's justice is absolutely assured. And we have some very powerful biblical examples of this.

And I want to take a moment to mention just one of these examples. When King David deliberately stayed home from the battle at a time when it was customary for the king to be present, and he lay abed all day. And then he rose in the afternoon, went up on the roof where he had reason to believe a beautiful woman would be taking a bath.

And then he sent an order for her to appear in his bed chamber. When did God exercise judicial timeliness in terms of King David? Well, if you're a careless reader and you're working your way through the historical books of Samuel, you remember having read that after the child was born, Nathan the prophet came, told the king a little story about the rich man that had a guest come. And so instead of sending his servant to his own flock to get a lamb to be slaughtered and fixed and served to the guest, he went, the servant that is went at the man's orders to a poor man's home.

A poor man that had a single ewe lamb that he carried about in his arms like an infant, probably a pet of the children, though that's a speculative statement. And he robbed the poor man of his single lamb, and that was served to the guest. When David heard the story, you remember he arose in indignation.

And then the prophet took his bony finger and poked it in the king's face and said, thou art the man. Is that when God judged David? At least nine months after the event? Well, some of you are as well aware as I am that some of the psalms were written by King David and relate directly to the event I have spoken of. For instance, Psalm 32, again Psalm 38, and certainly once more Psalm 51.

And what does David say in these psalms? Why he speaks about his lips being parched, his limbs being broken. He speaks about a separation from God. Listen, the day David sinned and did not judge himself, God judged him.

Now some of us confuse issues because we do not understand the judgments of God. And I know some of you have this straight, but I fear some of you do not. And for the sake of the do nots, I repeat a matter that the dues are acquainted with.

When you study the judgments of God in scripture, you find that they are in two basic forms. And for the want of any better terms, we refer to them as the remedial judgments of God and the final judgments of God. Now again, for the sake of those who are not yet clear, let me spell this out.

Do you know the word remedial? Well, I expect it's not in the daily vocabulary of most of us, but some have children in the public school system perhaps, some may have a background as a teacher, and you have heard about remedial reading classes. Now what is a remedial reading class? It's a special class for the children who are behind in their reading skills. It is a class intended to help them to catch up with their classmates in their reading skills.

I have described the judgments of God as falling into one or of two groups. Remedial, final. A remedial judgment is a judgment designed by God to enable a sinner to catch up with God, to return to God, to be re-established in a right relationship with God.

It can be and often is referred to as a gracious judgment. But then a final judgment is a judgment in which there is neither time nor opportunity to catch up. It's a destructive judgment, often, in fact for the most part, including death.

Now somewhere along the line there was a comment made about Ananias and Sapphira, and that is an excellent illustration. Did Peter say first to Ananias, now look Ananias, if you'll go over this way and back that way, you'll find a doorway to the right, go through there, there's a prayer chamber, go over to the prayer chamber and see if you can't find some cause for repentance. No, no.

The lie is told, the lie is verified, the judgment of God falls. Now let's just bring that into focus concerning our day. We're looking at a couple verses talking about prayer.

I've asked you, have you thought through why the prayer meeting is disappearing from the church? I've asked you if you've thought about prayers that anger God and result in tears to drink in great measure. Well dear friends, God is just. Do you think God likes to hear nonsense prayers? Do you think he's pleased when we beg him for physical benefits and are living in violation of his clear-cut orders? Remedial judgments give them tears to drink in great measure, or send them plagues of locusts like the Book of Joel, or send them a drought with the locusts, again, like the Book of Joel.

So think, if you will, carefully about these two remedial judgments, final judgments, and then answer in your own mind this next question, where is America in relationship to these matters? Have we been destroyed? Is everybody dead? Have we been turned over to our enemies by God himself? No. No, there's an incredible increase of what we refer to as natural disasters. Unfortunately my mind's not all that sharp, but a while back I read some statistics compiled by a German insurance company.

Now insurance companies are interested in natural disasters, obviously, because it affects their wallets very directly. And this insurance company, as I say, I don't have the exact facts, don't even remember the name of the company, but they said there had been a ten-fold increase in natural disasters over a period I think of approximately 20 years. And all of us are alert to this.

Are we not constantly amazed at the floods? Here's a whole region of the country that has had not a drop of rain for ever so long, and suddenly the clouds open up and seven inches of rain fall in 12 hours. And of course it doesn't do any good because the ground can't receive it that fast, and so it runs and destroys homes and businesses. Is that an accident or is there a God in charge? I'll not go into further detail.

I'm just asking you to think with me about this issue. God is holy. He cannot tolerate unholiness.

He has laid out his principles and his requirements. He has told us what to do. We will not do what he tells us, and so he brings us under judgment.

Because of his grace, he has begun with remedial judgments. But surely you must understand, if a people will not heed the remedial judgments, eventually the remedial judgments turn into final judgments. All of that to say to you, dear people, we don't have a lot of time to waste.

We are on the edge of the greatest calamity this nation has ever known. But God in incredible mercy has told us he is not satisfied. He has sent a series of remedial judgments, and those judgments include rotten politicians, so thoroughly corrupt, so absolutely blind to moral and eternal issues, that they pass law after law after law that leads us further and further and further down the path of destruction.

Now it's easy to hurl accusations at others, but what unconverted politician was ever on prayer ground? It's not his prayers that have been judged. He doesn't even make them. It's the prayers of God's people that offend God.

Now I did ask you to consider what kind of praying does result in the anger of God and in these judgments. Well again, time forbids me to be lengthy. I'm just trying to get you thinking seriously along Bible lines.

If God has sent a remedial judgment, it is very offensive to God when you ask him to lift that judgment. That judgment was sent with a purpose, and we ought to ask God to accomplish his purpose, and we ought indeed to even plead, don't lift the judgment until your purpose is accomplished. But that's not the way the church looks at things.

So as I said at some point yesterday, the church prayer meeting is marked by all kinds of prayers for God to lift judgments and not prayers for God to accomplish his purpose. Is it clear to you that no one ought ever to ask for deliverance from a problem until they have first been sure that God accomplished his purpose in the problem? Now these are sobering thoughts, are they not? But with those thoughts in our minds, let us then turn to the passage before us this evening in James chapter 4. Our dear brother Anthony has read the passage, but that was at the beginning of the service, and a few of you were not able to get here on time, and others of you are like I am, not all that good at remembering things. Well I'm not going to read the chapter through again, but I do want to go over the portions that accompany the text before we come to the text itself.

So verse 1 of James 4, what is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and you do not have, so you commit murder. You're envious and you cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

You ask and you do not receive because you ask amiss. Now I asked you in the beginning, why is the prayer meeting in the American church in decline? Who wants to go to a prayer meeting where you're basically talking to yourself? A prayer meeting where God is present beats everything else in the human existence. I don't know anything more wonderful than a prayer meeting where God is present.

There was a time in our lives, Maggie and mine, when we had unscheduled prayer meetings in our home. Just every once in a while I would feel stirred and I'd send out a notice to about two dozen men that we were going to meet for prayer and give the date. Sometimes a single day, sometimes two days.

At that time we lived in a large facility and could easily accommodate a couple of dozen. Now some of you men may know exactly what I'm speaking about. Every once in a while my dear wife Maggie slips up to me, reaches in my pocket, takes out my appointment book, looks through it, makes notes because I'm not all as good as I ought to be in telling her what's on the schedule.

She's leafing through it and she says to me, what is this prayer meeting? She names the date. I said it's one of our periodic days of prayer. Did you tell the men when you invited them that it was a day of fasting? No.

Then you are expecting that these men will be fed? Yes. And you didn't think it necessary to consult me? No. I have other commitments that day.

I'm sorry Maggie. I'm sure that we have some friends who would be glad to care for this. This is my home.

I am the hostess here. When there are guests, they are my pleasure and responsibility. I'll cancel my plans and be here.

Oh, you don't need to do that. That's the way I do things. Well, it was gentle and kind, but it was pretty clear.

So the men gather. And in meetings of that sort, you never do quite know what to expect. There were not a lot.

I think maybe 18 or 20 who came. We started, I think, at seven in the morning. And along about eight o'clock, one of the brothers launched into a prayer.

Now, sir, you do go to prayer meetings occasionally. Were you ever in a prayer meeting when you thought, I wish that person would sit down and shut up? Oh, don't answer because I don't want you to embarrass yourself or anybody else. But I think at least some of you know what I'm talking about.

Well, now, on this occasion, this brother launches into prayer, and I keep saying, Lord, don't let him quit. Don't let him quit. Don't let him.

I mean, it's all inside. I wasn't shouting it, but my word, heaven came down. The roof came off.

God was present. It was glorious. But in the midst of that prayer, which might have been 45 minutes long, there was a commotion, but we were too intent on the Lord to pay any attention.

And then after a spell, that urgency of prayer lifted. And I glanced at my watch, and it said three in the afternoon. And I thought, oh, no, Maggie has canceled her plans.

She has stayed home. She has prepared lunch. And we prayed right through the lunch hour.

I went looking for her. I found her in a distant part of the house, and she was humming a Christian song and had this great smile on her face. And I tried to apologize.

And she made it clear, you don't need to apologize to me. Well, my dear, you stay home to prepare lunch. That doesn't matter.

And this is what she said to me. I knew the Lord had come. Are you engaged in prayer meetings like that? A few weeks later, one of the men who prayed with us regularly in those days came and called and asked if he could come and have a day of my time.

And we made an arrangement, and we came. And he and I were deep in discussion about a very significant spiritual matter. And then I noticed that his eyes were tracing the movement of something on the carpet.

And he wasn't really focused anymore on the conversation. And I glanced, and there's a big bug crawling across the floor. And he said, well, let me get up and remove it.

And I said, oh, think nothing of it. We're in the woods here, and we have lots of bugs at this season of the year. And I stood up, and I crushed that bug under my heel.

Not a very good thing for the carpet, but that's what happened. Then after a bit, my wife rang the lunch bell. And so we went to the lunchroom.

And he said, Miss Maggie, I do not want to embarrass you, but something happened this morning that brought a flood of memories back to me. While Dick and I were deep in conversation, a big bug walked across the carpet. He got up and crushed it under his heel.

And once again, I was back in the prayer meeting when God came. And I fell on the floor, and Christ crushed me under his heel. And I died, only to be raised immediately as a new man in Christ.

Now, when prayer meetings are such that God can come, they're marvelous. But when they provoke God to anger and tears, that's another matter. And I'm pleading with you now.

Take this matter seriously. Set your heart to become the kind of a praying person that God will delight to come to. Will you look at the end of this chapter now, and notice the last verse of this passage.

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. We've heard about the sins of omission. We've heard about the sins of commission.

But this last verse of the fourth chapter of James is speaking of an aggravated sin. Are you aware of that term? An aggravated sin. Well, you say, Mr. Roberts, what is that? A sin made the worse by the circumstances in which it appears.

To him that knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. We all know the immense importance of vital, earnest, real, unhyprocritical prayer. The prayer that rejoices God's heart.

The prayer that permits God to unleash the flood of his spirit upon a people and upon a land. And the one thing that has hope in it, we set aside as inconsequential. And your situation tonight is more dangerous, because I took this time to speak this way, than it was before you came.

For you've had another slant now. Some of you have heard this type of thing before, but now you've had a refresher course in this matter. Our responsibility has increased.

And can the old preacher hope that these moments were not wasted? Now, the purpose specifically of using James for tonight, we have not yet approached. But here we are at the heart of the passage. I spoke some already about backsliding.

And all of us who have experienced backsliding know what a loathsome thing it is. And how damaging it is to those who have been harmed by our backsliding. And how hateful it is to God.

But we have in front of us tonight, an incredibly wonderful, preservative against backsliding. Will you let that register in your heart? Some of you know that old hymn, prone to wander. Lord, I feel it.

Prone to leave the God I love. I doubt that there are any genuine Christians here who have felt something of the tug of backsliding. And maybe have gone some distance backward before, by God's grace, recovery occurred.

We have tonight a list of seven preservatives against backsliding. But in addition to there being a list of seven preservatives against backsliding, there are the same seven helps for the backslider in returning to God. And what backsliding must have happened to it.

But also, in that the great theme of our gathering these days is revival, these same seven things are wonderful, wonderful issues in our fulfilling the plan and the purpose of God in preparing the way of the Lord. As we were looking at it out of Luke 3 yesterday. So, let me read now the section that we focus upon.

The whole chapter is wonderfully tied together. But in verses 7 to 10, we have a list of seven immensely consequential matters that can be a very great help to everyone here. As I said already, as a preservative against backsliding, as a great assistance in returning from backsliding, and as a glorious way of preparing the way of the Lord so that indeed the sunrise from on high may visit us.

Verses 7 to 10. Submit, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Be miserable, and mourn, and weep, and let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and he will exalt you. What a wonderful list.

So eminently practical, so greatly needed, so wonderfully designed by God for multiple purposes. Number one, submit to God. Some of you were able to be present this afternoon when our dear brother John gave us a lengthy reading from Exodus, the last portion, and he noted many times in which it was clearly said Moses did precisely what the Lord commanded.

A difficulty of great numbers of believers is that they think doing approximately what the Lord commanded is adequate, but approximately is no good. It is not acceptable. We must do precisely what God commands.

Some of you can remember that incident recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 6. The ark of the covenant had been missing from its rightful place for somewhere in the range of 70 years. At the time of the priesthood of Eli, that father of rotten sons who failed to deal with his sons as a man of God ought, the ark of the covenant was carried off by the Philistines, and for all the rest of the years of Samuel's ministry during the

whole reign of Saul and in the early part of David's reign as king, the ark of the covenant was missing from its rightful place. Then David came under the burden to bring the ark of God home, and so he took a vast crowd of men with him, and they went down and laid hold of the ark, and to get it home easily, they got a new cart, and they had it drawn by an animal, and they set out to bring the ark home, and a dumb farm boy accompanying the ark when it hit the rough part of the road reached out and touched the ark, and God struck that boy dead, and as we were informed this afternoon, and rightly so, David burst out in great anger and called the place Perez Azza because God had made a breach.

But later David came to his senses and understood you don't do God's commandments approximately, you do them exactly, and you remember in the account that they had to leave the ark for a season, and the place where it was left, the great blessing of God came, but eventually they went down again and got it, but this time not approximately, but exactly. For you remember that the commandment was very specific, the ark must be carried on the shoulders of the Kohites, not on a new cart, and where did the notion of a new cart come from? The same source as most of the novelties in today's church. You don't ask the Lord how to do it, I mean the prayer meeting is canceled, and if it still exists the pastors of the big churches don't participate, you ask the Philistines how should we do it? Most of the mega churches are guided not by the word of God, but by the business men of the nation who tell the church what will work and what won't.

Now this is incredibly important because who was really guilty in that matter of the ark? When the farm boy reached up and steadied the ark and was struck dead by God, was he really the guilty party? Now we mustn't overlook this fact, God has his plans and purposes. Now above all others David was the guilty party, he should have known better, he should have said to the priest and those that went with them, before we do anything let's go back to the word of God and get precise instructions. He did not do that, he ordered, he moved, he urged the crowd and down they went and got the young fellow killed.

God could have killed David, he certainly deserved it, but God had a purpose for David that had not yet been fulfilled, but he made it clear that he did not approve of what went on. You see part of our problem is we look at the person that takes the brunt of the punishment and we think oh well he deserved it, we might be the one that inspired him to do the wrong thing. But now we have this clear-cut statement in James 4, submit to the Lord.

That is not the equivalent of saying good morning Lord, that's not the equivalent of saying I believe. Submitting to the Lord means you do just that, you don't do anything, but it's what he wants done. It doesn't matter that when Christ cleansed the temple and said my father's house which was intended as a house of prayer, you have turned into a place of merchandise, oh what does that matter? But after the second cleansing of the temple, Christ mounted the hill overlooking the temple site and he said your house is left unto you desolate.

Has it registered with you that the Lord left the temple at that time never to return? But while earlier Christ had said the temple would be destroyed and there would not be one stone left standing upon another, it did not happen then. The temple remained standing until the year 70. Now we don't know the exact number of years because we're not certain in what year Christ died, but just to simplify things and perhaps not with perfect accuracy, let's say the second cleansing of the temple occurred in the year 33 and the destruction of the temple occurred in the year 70.

So for 37 years they played with religion and God had nothing whatsoever to do with it. Now that's not a remote historical fact. That's a picture of today's church abandoned by God.

Our place to worship the God of our imagination, not the God of the Bible because we have not submitted to the Lord. Now this of course is a major issue throughout scripture and many of us are acquainted with numerous passages in which this is truly a very urgent issue. Christ himself asked some who were pretending to follow him, why do you call me Lord but you don't do what I say? I want to ask each one here tonight, do you do what God says? Not approximately, not occasionally, not even frequently, but have you truly submitted to the Lord? Do I need to mention that backsliding frequently begins with non-submission? And oftentimes this non-submission is in a very inconsequential area it seems.

Just to illustrate, quite some time ago a new convert came to me and he said Mr. Roberts, the Lord has brought me under very great conviction about smoking and I have to give it up. I didn't need to make a reply. Then not long after that a fellow worker of this man came to me and he said I want to ask you a question.

You're the minister aren't you? And he named the church, yes. He said I work with a fellow that goes to that church. He used to stink up our office so badly people were gasping for breath.

He was a chain smoker. But I've noticed recently he smells fresh. There's no smoking going on.

I want to ask you what happened to that man? And I told him. But then in a few weeks the man who had quit smoking came to talk to me and I looked at him and I said you've been smoking? Yes. You told me the Lord told you to quit.

Oh he did. And yet you're smoking. Now I'm not making an issue of smoking.

Why do I care if you want to stink? But when the Lord says quit and you don't or he says quit and you do for a little while that's another matter. So when he came again and admitted he was smoking I said you told me the Lord convicted you. He did.

And yet you're smoking. Yes he said in the period in which I quit smoking I gained five pounds and I began to think which is worse to be fat or to smoke? And I decided to return to smoking and I said to him I want to guarantee you you will never grow an inch spiritually from now on until you come back to the command God gave you personally and obey it. Non-submission to God is a guarantee of backsliding.

But when you submit to God even if you've been backslidden for months it's a wonderful beginning of a fresh new relationship. Will you take God's word seriously? Will you carefully go over your thought life, your deeds, your words and ask honestly does everything about me demonstrate the fact that I am in total submission to God and I'm unwilling at any point to be in rebellion against him? Number two verse seven again resist the devil and he will flee from you. Now we have a very practical statement with which many of us are familiar in Ephesians 4 verses 26 and 27.

Be angry and yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity. Well that's a good instruction not only about anger but about everything.

Don't ever let the sun go down on a sin in your life. But that's what happened to David. He sinned and then he thought he had gotten away with it and he lived in it for months and months.

He knew his soul was dry. He knew he had lost the preciousness of God's nearness but he persisted in the sin because he hadn't been caught. But he was caught.

The very night he refused to repent he was caught by the only one that really matters the Lord God himself. I'm pleading with you deal with your sin and put it away the very day that you commit it. Now you understand how it's supposed to work and in most church families today it can't work right because it's not only the individual who's in sin but the corporate entity of the church.

I had a group of young fellows who had been sitting under my ministry for a spell and they all attended a church and they came to me one day and they said Mr. Roberts we went to the group and talked to our pastor about church discipline and we asked our pastor when was the last time this church practiced church discipline and the pastor said you can't practice church discipline now because you might be sued. Well they said when was the last time it was practiced? Oh he said I don't know never since I've been here and I suppose for years before that. You know what God said you are to judge yourself every day and put your sin away and if you don't then your church is to bring you under judgment.

Church discipline is not intended to destroy or to remove but to bring an unrepentant person to repentance. The average church won't practice it at all and some of the churches that do practice it use it as a means of getting rid of somebody they don't want. Now if we were living in a healthy time of the history of the church it would be easier but most people don't have a church to help them but that's no excuse.

I'm asking you do you perpetually resist the devil? If when you have submitted to God after being backslidden for a season you're going to have to resist the devil or you'll be back again where you were and as long as you're resisting the devil along with submitting to God it's going to be very difficult to backslide and as long as you are submissive to God and resisting the devil you have made excellent progress in preparing the way of holiness for God to come in a divine visitation. Oh again I say to you how wonderful it will be when the sunshine from on high visits us. And then the third issue here and of equally great consequence to these first two.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Now the evangelical church in America has messed this up greatly. We've pretended that if a person has a moment in which they seek God they've got this matter resolved forever.

How often must one seek God? How often one must one draw near to God? Do you remember the words that King David spoke to his son Solomon at the time he was unable to continue in his work? Do you remember what he said to his son? As for you my son Solomon know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind for the Lord searches all hearts and he understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek him he will let you find him but if you forsake him he will forsake you. And you remember I trust that our savior said seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

And then he made it clear that everyone is a seeker after something and I want to ask you what are you seeking? And people say to me very directly Mr. Roberts you just don't understand things rightly. I sought the Lord and found him so I don't need to seek. And others have said do you realize that God is not lost? I don't need to seek him.

Well I'll tell you why you need to seek him because he dwells in a high and lofty place and you don't. And if you don't seek him he will forsake you. This seeking God is perpetual.

Every day of our lives we're called upon to seek him. How can you backslide when you've submitted to God you've resisted the devil and you're constantly seeking him? Do you remember the story of Rehoboam? You recall that time when the kingdom was divided into the northern and the southern kingdoms and then we're told about Rehoboam. Have you noted these words in 2nd Chronicles 12 14? Rehoboam did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord.

Get that! He did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord. You have two alternatives. Set your heart to seek the Lord and be blessed.

Refuse to set your heart to seek the Lord and do evil. It is a command to seek God and to seek God perpetually. Do you remember the account of King Asa? He began his reign by encouraging the people to seek God.

He did wonders very well for a season then he got very diseased in his feet and he ceased seeking God and instead he sought the help of physicians. Some years ago when Henry Blackabee and Ron Owen and I were doing what we called Revival Heritage Tours. They were wonderful occasions.

I wished all of you could have participated but we took groups to the United Kingdom and visited many of the great sites where God had come and worked wonders among the people. One day we were in Olney. O-L-N-E-Y.

Do any of you recognize that name? Olney. The place where John Newton had such an incredibly powerful ministry. Henry and I took turns speaking several times in the course of an average day but on that morning when we were at Newton's former church in Olney I was speaking and I just simply gave what we call a Bible reading.

We went through that portion of 2 Chronicles that deals with Asa and I would read a bit and explain a bit and read a bit and explain a bit and the Lord was clearly present. When I finished our dear friend Ron Owen said to the group the pastor or the rector is here. I want him to come forward and to greet you.

He had been in the back so this man with great reluctance came to the front. Pretend this brother is me. I know it's better for you to be you but just for a moment pretend.

So this rector comes down the aisle, reaches where I'm seated and suddenly collapses on the floor and we were all taken with great surprise and nobody knew what was going on. Somebody might be suspicious that I'm a hidden Pentecostal but that's not true and after quite a while he managed to recover and stand and with tears flowing down his face he said I haven't felt like this since the day I was ordained. The presence of God so powerful.

Well I didn't want to embarrass him and so I waited until all our people were out looking around the graveyard and he and I were left and I went up to him simply to offer any help I could give and again he fell flat on the floor. I know I'm not making anything of this please don't but I want you to realize when you submit to God, when you resist the devil, when you draw near to God and God draws near to you which is what was happening that morning through the word of God we were drawing near to God and that rector was smitten by the presence of God. I don't know what happened next don't ask me I'm as ignorant as you are on the matter I'm just telling you it's an order from our father for us to seek him day in day out every

day of our lives don't you dare fail to keep this order.

But then the next statement is one that you might not have expected in this sequence of truth. Have a look at it if you will we're still in the same passage draw near to God verse four he will draw near to you and then number four cleanse your hands you sinners.

Now if this were a group of children I would expect immediate response but seeing as it's you I don't know what will happen but here's an order hold your hands out in front of you look at them how clean are your hands I'm not speaking of did you wash them I'm asking how clean are your hands do you realize that Job in the midst of his great struggle said he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger and the opposite although not stated by Job is clear he who has dirty hands grows weaker and weaker what are we being asked to do commanded to do in this statement cleanse your hands oh sinner my dear friends will you come before God in integrity and ask him how clean he thinks your hands are maybe you've been touching money in a way that is displeasing to him maybe you've been using sex in a way that is contrary to his will and purpose or maybe God has been working wonderfully through you and you've been sharing his glory whenever the glory of God is present we are all in danger of taking some of that glory to ourselves I mentioned my friend Ron Owen the musician often when we're together in meetings he sings touch not the glory touch not the glory for the glory belongs to God cleanse your hands oh sinners and next purify your hearts you double-minded purify your hearts oh I get I get I've got to get rid of all dirty thoughts no no that's not the issue at stake well what is the issue at stake purify your hearts you double-minded our precious savior said blessed are the pure in heart what was he speaking of when a person has no licentious thoughts they're pure in heart the psalmist prayed unite my heart to fear thy name the average Christian has a divided heart do you our savior made it clear you cannot love both God and mammon but look at what we've got here in James 4 oh what searching powerful words these are verse 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 is that clear to you you cannot maintain friendship with the world and friendship with God the divided heart of the of is a person who has trying been trying to hang on to God with one hand and hang on to the world in some fashion with the other is that you have you come to that deep realization that if you're going to have if you're going to be a friend of God you've got to be an enemy of the world what a tragedy for a professed believer to waste their life trying the impossible some time ago in a meeting that turned very serious when people were weeping and God was deeply stirring was getting later and later the meeting been over a long time and people were weeping and many of them coming for prayer some for a word of help and maybe about 11 30 that night the pastor came down the aisle and waited until the person speaking to me left and then he said Mr.

Roberts I know it's late and I know you're tired but could you speak to one more person oh yes brother bring her down and so the pastor went again to the back and he brought this woman down fortunate fortunately it was a long aisle and as they were coming I lifted my heart and said Lord the pastor couldn't help her how could I I can't help her unless you help me and immediately the Lord told me what to do so when she came and was introduced and we sat down together I asked her this question where do you disagree with God I'm asking that question to you where do you disagree with God she looked at me in shock she said that's a terrible thing for you to say I don't disagree with God I love God now I said to her I'm very tired I don't really see any point to wasting any more time if you will

not be honest there's no point in talking to me I asked you where do you disagree with God she said I don't ah but I said you do no she said I told yes you do well I admit I love the world when she walked down the aisle the Lord said to me look at her here's a woman about 65 dolled up to look about 30 world written all

over her and when she said I do love the world I said you're gonna have to face this question one of two people is a liar either you or Christ which one is it Christ said you cannot love God and mammon you say you can love God and mammon somebody's lying is it Christ is it you and she burst into a terrible weep and she said I understand now it's me do you understand how impossible it is to love both God and the world purify your hearts you double minded sooner or later

everyone must make that choice will I continue in my love of the world and pretend to love God or will I come to the total end of all love of the world and love God with a pure heart number six it may seem a bit odd but it's here and it's desperately important to this occasion tonight verse nine be miserable and mourn and weep let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom and somebody is thinking oh no I hate gloomy people now God is telling me I got to be gloomy I got to stop smiling I got to get rid of my joy I got to go around with my chin hanging on the ground God is not stupid he doesn't make people clean so that they can be joyful and then forbid their joy but there are seasons you know the reflections of Solomon in Ecclesiastes there's a time and a season for

everything here we're living on the edge of destruction as a nation the church has become obnoxious in the sight of God much that is going on is ridiculously sinful there is indeed a time for weeping and mourning it's upon us and we're trying to keep our chin up and a smile on their face when the time has come for mourning what about heeding the word of the Lord what about weeping over the state of the church and don't forget that in some fashion you're a part of that church that you need to weep over are the angels of heaven looking down upon you with great smiles are they constantly praising God because of the solid work of grace going onward in your life or are the angels themselves weeping and mourning because you've been so careless about matters of such eternal consequence we're

living at a time when tears are in order and it's terribly hard to backslide when you're weeping and mourning over sin all around you I'm not encouraging perpetual tears this passage is not urging constant mourning but it is making it clear that when the church is backslidden when the hope of revival is virtually non-existent because of the condition even of those who are asking for it a time of mourning a weeping has come finally number seven humble yourself in the presence of God and he will exalt you I spoke a little yesterday about humility I mentioned to you the way that John the Baptist maintained humility by never comparing himself with anyone other than the Lord I must ask you now as your friend and I hope your brother have you humbled yourself now look we know God always holds at

arm's length the proud in heart now look you see the length of my arm how meaningful would it be if I held you at arm's length my word I almost have to keep from being spit upon but let's not be silly how long is God's arm if God holds you at arm's length you are an infinite distance from God and thus the command is clear humble yourself may I urge each of you to go over this passage time after time after time until you know that you have submitted to the Lord until if you've been backslidden you're fully healed until there is such a resistance built in you by God himself against backsliding that it won't happen again until you know that you've done what you can to prepare the way of the Lord

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