

I. Introduction

- A. I'd like to start today by honoring our Veterans. Would you please stand.
- B. Our hearts are heavy for our friends in Paradise CA, which has been devastated by fire. We in Redding feel this with you. We ache with you. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine... and in times like these, it rages out of control. I'd like us to pray for the people of Paradise.
 - 1. Lord, our hearts are heavy today for the people of a little city called Paradise CA. You see the fires. You see the destruction, the devastation, and the deaths. You know the anguish of each heart, and the needs of every soul.
 - 2. The devil has come to steal, kill, and destroy, and he has unleashed his fury against this town. Lord, we do not know what to say. We do not know what to do. But our eyes are on you.
 - 3. Oh Lord, heal. Oh Lord, deliver. Stop the fires. Stop the destruction. Save lives. Help the firefighters and first responders. Surround them.
 - 4. Begin now to mend broken hearts. Begin now to plant seeds of hope. For all who are helping, give strength. And for all who are hurting, give comfort.
 - 5. Lord, in this dark hour, we turn to you, and commend to you the hurting people of Paradise. Be their bulwark and their strength now and in days to come.
 - 6. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

II. Message

- A. Our topic is How to Be a Grown Up. Our source is the Bible, and specifically the Book of James in the Bible. Section by section, James has developed one really important theme: Grow Up.
 - 1. Grow up beyond your emotional turmoil. (Emotional Ownership)
 - 2. Grow up beyond your moral indulgences. (Moral Responsibility)
 - 3. Grow up beyond your internal contradiction. (Spiritual Integration)
 - 4. Grow up beyond your weak and wimpy loves. (Virtue Love)
 - 5. Grow up beyond your fantasies and illusions. (Reality Check)
 - 6. Grow up beyond your legalism and worldliness. (Grace Operating System)
 - 7. Grow up beyond your needless drama. (Drama-Free Zone)
 - a) On the day Jesus saved you, he set before you a Promised Land. Inside this promised land is the life of your dreams. It is the land of spiritual maturity. When you are in this land, then the key verse of James is true of you:
(1) But let [endurance] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:4)
- B. There is the stated goal: that you may be mature and complete lacking nothing.
 - 1. Lacking nothing you need for the abundant life Jesus promised.
 - 2. Lacking nothing you need for joy in the midst of sorrow.
 - 3. Lacking nothing you need for victory in the giant Pain Machine.
 - 4. Lacking nothing you need for great relationships and a healthy family.
 - 5. Lacking nothing you need to accomplish God's plan for your life in this world.
 - a) and... most importantly of all...
- C. James writes that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing you need for an overflow of heavenly rewards and an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven someday.
 - 1. Heaven is a gift.
 - 2. But on top of heaven, God promises rewards in heaven. James talked about these back in chapter one (1:12, "the crown of life").
 - 3. Spiritual maturity on earth creates capacity for eternal rewards in heaven.
 - a) There are a lot of reasons, once you are saved, to keep on growing in your fellowship with God. We all need this wonderful Grace Pathway. James is begging us to not be satisfied as a spiritual baby and to just grow up.
- D. Our topic today:
 - 1. #8: SUBMITTED SOVEREIGNTY: I rise to my fullest royalty when I surrender the unwinnable war to play God, and accept life's unchangables with dignity, poise, and grace.
- E. Yes, this fallen world is a morally broken pain machine. Everything was changed by the fall. Yes, there's good stuff. But there's a lot of bad stuff. Adam's sin spoiled the whole fruit bowl. The devil's spit is on everything. It's a pain machine out there.
- F. It's a pain machine in here too. Your mind isn't what it was created to be. Your emotions are broken. Your soul is twisted in ways you'll never stop discovering — not in this lifetime. And your will, your volition — the part of you that makes choices — is addicted to playing God.
 - 1. Fighting God is one thing — you know what you're doing.
 - 2. But Playing God is something else — you hardly know you're doing it.
 - a) And the problem is that when you play God, pain always happens. Whenever we play God, we become gears and pulleys for the Giant Pain Machine. You do it, I do it.
- G. So James, as always, gets under our skin, and says, "Let's see how you might be playing God and not even know it."
- H. Let's get into James.

III. Exposition

- A. *Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? (James 4:11, 12)*
 - A. Pretty simple, pretty clear.
 - B. 1. You are playing God whenever you are judgmental.

3. But we have to define judge. Because, paradoxically, James is judging those who judge, right? See what I mean? There's some really sloppy, and actually sick and dangerous, teaching around that says it's never okay to judge. This leads to ultra-tolerance. And ultra-tolerance is fake, and deadly.
 - a) A murderer should be judged. A criminal should be judged. An abuser should be judged. A thief should be judged. People who cheat should be judged.
 - b) Every time a teacher gives a grade, they're making judgments. Every time a boss gives a performance review, they're making judgments. Every time a parent tells their kid to clean their room better, they're making judgments.
 - c) I think you get the idea. Judging has to happen.
 - d) In fact, you can't not judge.
 - e) You're always forming judgments. This is right. This is wrong. This is good. This is bad. You did a good job. You did a bad job. Judging is part and parcel of the human condition.
4. Therefore, there must be a healthy way of judging and an evil way of judging. Let's sort them out.
5. Actually, James helps us sort this out. He has given us here three clear signs that the kind of judging you are doing is the evil kind of judging.
 - a) You speak evil.
 - (1) That is, you damage their reputation needlessly. You pretend you can see their heart and you condemn their motives. Gossip, backbiting, slander.
 - (2) If a person is dangerous, yeah, warn the community. But this evil speaking does not go with a mature Christian heart.
 - (3) And I have to add this too. The main place this happens, you know what it is? In the family. People get this running dialog in their minds about their spouse or kids or parents and how horrible they are. You keep a record. You keep a rap sheet on them.
 - (4) It's judging, and it's immature, and it's hurting the relationship.
 - (5) These second sign of evil judging is:
 - b) You are a hypocrite.
 - (1) When you do a variation on the same sin that you're judging, what does that make you? A hypocrite.
 - (2) Yes, the action is wrong, and maybe, maybe, possibly, there is a situation in which you should say so, even though you are equally guilty.
 - (3) But, when you act superior, and better than, and then pass judgment, your judging is evil. You are not a doer of the law. You are just another judge playing God.
 - (a) Am I stepping on anybody's toes today? I hope not. I mean I hope so.
 - c) You set yourself above God's law.
 - (1) How do you set yourself above God's law? By having a critical attitude.
 - (2) How does that set you above God's law? Because if you judge and condemn others all the time with a bitter spirit, then you are saying that you possess a higher principle than the Law of God, which tells you not to do that.
 - (3) In other words, you are a law unto yourself.
 - (4) And if that's the case, you are playing God... thus adding rocket fuel to the giant pain machine.
 - d) There is one Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy, and, surprise, it isn't you. And please let me point out that this is the New Testament calling God the Lawgiver, because all the books of the Bible tell the same story about the same God and the same salvation, no matter what Andy Stanley says.
 - e) Yes, every believer in Jesus is spiritual royalty. Yes, you, as a child of God, possess your own sovereignty. But, it's always a mini-mini-sovereignty because it is submitted to and respectful of the infinite, majestic, sovereignty of God.
 - f) The moment you forget there is a Lawgiver and Judge in heaven, is the moment you start playing God. And that's not good for anybody.
 - g) The Word of God puts you in your place. Sometimes, people resent that. Sometimes they hate it. But if you're growing in the Lord, you're learning to love the fact that God is God and you are not. And you're content with that.
6. The first way the fallen heart likes to play God is whenever you are judgmental.
7. Here's the second way.
- B. *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:13-17)*
 1. *2. You are playing God whenever your plans ignore the God-factor.*
 2. I think James 4:14 is one of the most beautiful statements of the smallness of human life:
 - a) *For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (James 4:14)*
 3. We are a mass of contradictions.
 - a) We are these noble, regal, eternal beings that startle the mighty angels.
 - (1) and...
 - b) We are frail mud and dirt that is here today and gone tomorrow.
 - (1) Life is fragile.
 4. And even when we have everything planned out, we have no control over the world. The future is a mystery.
 5. What is James saying? No matter how many plans you make, and how much money you gain, you still can never control tomorrow.
 6. We should habitually know that moment by moment we are absolutely dependent on God. We are dependent on him for the success of our plans. We are dependent on him for whether or not we wake up tomorrow morning.

7. And here's the big thing: the mature child of God can accept whatever happens, because you know that God is working all things together for your good.
8. There's a story in the Bible of man named Saul, who would one day change his name to Paul. But Saul hated Christians, and wanted to persecute them out of existence. One day, he is traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus to round up Christians and arrest them. On the road to Damascus, a bright light comes out of heaven, and slams Saul to the ground. He is frightened, and he is suddenly blinded.
9. God talks to him: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Because God takes it personally when anybody harms his people.
10. Saul says: Who are you, Lord?
11. The Lord says: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."
12. I wonder how shocking that was to Paul. He was sick and tired of Jesus. If you just said the name Jesus, and somebody ratted you out, Paul wanted you dead. Now, this same Jesus has blinded him with light and is speaking to him from heaven.
13. So Jesus says: "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*" Then he adds this weird line: "*It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*" (Acts 9:5)
14. This was a proverb in the ancient world. The picture is on ox pulling a plow, and a driver goading it on with a sharp stick. If the ox kicks against the stick, it makes life worse, because the ox hurts itself.
15. Here is Paul. All life long, God has been motivating Paul to come to him. These are the goads. People tell him about Jesus. His whole Old Testament Bible told him about Jesus, no matter what Andy Stanley is saying. Circumstances. Coincidences. Random blessings. Even random troubles... all of these are God's motivations to drive Paul to the one inescapable conclusion that makes all truth make sense: Jesus is Lord of all, and you, Paul are not.
16. So all these incentives and motivations are in Paul's life, and what does he do?
17. He kicks against them.
18. And how does that feel?
19. Life is just "hard."
 - a) Listen, I've been up front with you about my own grief through the fires we been facing. I've been working through the stages of grief. This new fire in Paradise has reawakened these feelings.
 - b) God is patient. He understands our weakness.. and he is not upset at our grief. He is tender and gracious and patient and good.
 - c) Even so, this I know: it may take some time, but spiritual maturity brings you to a place where you can "accept" the unchangeables in your life with dignity, poise, and grace.
 - d) Over 350 years ago, while Pilgrims braved the seas, Puritan pastor Jeremiah Burroughs offered this classic definition: "Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."
 - e) Translation: God gets to be God, and I don't get to whine.
 - f) I don't even get to fret.
 - g) And I especially don't get to kick and buck against the goads.
20. And this is always the case.
21. When you do not submit your mini-sovereignty to God's infinite sovereignty, life is harder than it needs to be.
22. Listen, life is hard anyway. Don't kick against God. He is goading you to a place of maximum grace, and maximum satisfaction, and maximum joy in your life.
23. Sorry, no, you don't know better than God.
24. That spirit is boasting. It is arrogance. It is evil.
25. Why?
26. Because you are playing God, and playing God is not a good idea when there is a real God above.
27. And here's the thing: you know better.
28. In all these things he's been talking about... when you play God, you set yourself in the realm of sin. And when you set yourself in the realm of sin, you set yourself in the realm of heartbreak, frustration, and needless drama.
29. In other words, the immature believer has no excuse. You know you should grow up, but you don't. So don't whine when the Pain Machine has its way with you, and you feel you don't have the resources to deal with it.
30. So far, we have seen two ways of playing God:
 - a) You play God whenever you are judgmental.
 - b) You play God whenever you ignore the God factor in your everyday life.
31. Here's the third way:
 - C. *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [Armies]. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. (James 5:1-6)*
 1. *3. You play God whenever you exploit, use, manipulate, or abuse others for your own self-interest.*
 2. And by playing God, I mean you are nothing like the true God of heaven.
 3. This is financial exploitation, but it could be anything.
 4. Back in Chicago days, I was invited by a judge to give the invocation at her swearing in. She was a former colleague of Margi's, and now was going to be judge Superior Court Judge in DuPage county. She asked me to do the invocation at her swearing in. I was happy to do it, because every judge in town was there, and I figured that couldn't hurt if I ever got a speeding ticket.

5. So I did the prayer.
6. I prayed that all who came before this judge, rich and poor, powerful and weak, would get nothing but the law, justly applied.
7. But the biggest part of the prayer that I prayed was this: that as a judge, my friend — who was not a believer — would never forget that day to come when she herself would stand before the court above, and the Judge of all flesh.
8. The judges asked me for a copy of that prayer, including the top judge in the district.
9. Listen. There may be some horrible people in your life. They exploit people, bully people. They use their power, their influence, their money. And they step on people and get away with it.
10. I'm here to tell you, they get away with nothing.
11. The reason they get away with nothing is because every person they hurt is praying to God, and when exploited people pray to God, he suits up for war.
12. He is called the Lord of Sabaoth, which means Armies.
13. God is too great to fit into one label or one name. So he has given us many names in the Bible to show us many dimensions of his character.
14. One of those names is Lord Sabaoth.
15. The Lord of Hosts, which means The Lord of Armies. This name is used 235 times in the Bible. For example:
 - a) *Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies. (Isaiah 1:24)*
16. You do not want to mess with the Lord of Hosts.
17. But you say, that's right. I'm not going to mess with the Lord of hosts.
18. But when you play God in other people's lives, when you abuse them, use them, exploit them, or manipulate them, you are messing with the Lord of hosts.
19. And he is going to do to you what you did to that spider you saw in the garage a few days ago.

IV. Conclusion

- A. What is this section of Scripture about?
- B. It is about the authority of God. Specifically it is about the authority of God in the life of the immature Christian, because the immature Christian is more about playing God than respecting God.
- C. Want to know why the world is a Pain Machine?
- D. Because long, long ago, the human race rebelled against the authority of God. The rebellion continues... and so does the pain machine until Jesus returns (5:7, the next verse).
- E. But, inside the pain machine, there can be joy. Inside the pain machine there can be love. There can be freedom, and success, and victory, and happiness, and meaning, and purpose, and life.
- F. How?
- G. By respecting the "godness" of God.
- H. A famous Chicago preacher named A.W. Tozer wrote a wonderful book on who God is. It's called *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Here is a paragraph from that book:
 1. *Even to discuss the authority of Almighty God seems a bit meaningless, and to question it would be absurd. Can we imagine the Lord God of Hosts having to request permission of anyone or to apply for anything to a higher body? To whom would God go for permission? Who is higher than the Highest? Who is mightier than the Almighty? Whose position antedates that of the Eternal? At whose throne would God kneel? Where is the greater one to whom He must appeal? "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." (A.W. Tozer)*
- I. To kick against God is to fight an unwinnable war. Surrender. Give it up.
- J. Accept his will.
 1. #8: SUBMITTED SOVEREIGNTY: I rise to my fullest royalty when I surrender the unwinnable war to play God, and accept life's unchangeables with dignity, poise, and grace.

V. Bible Memory Verse

- A. Last week:
 1. *James 4:6: But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."*
- B. This week:
 1. *James 4:14b: Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.*