

Introduction

James 4

Review

So we all have bucket lists, things we want to do before we die. For years, I had on my bucket list to race in the Baja 1000. So not many of you know this but four years ago I actually did exactly that. I competed in the Baja 1000 in the class 3 division which is short bed lightweight truck category and after a grueling 23 hours I crossed the finish line in 4th place.

Now what I just told you is complete fiction. I would like to have done that but I have never done anything of the sort. The reason I said that was only to give a real-time example of the difference between a claim and a reality. People can claim anything. That doesn't make it true.

We are in James chapter 4 where we are surveying tests of genuine faith.

It's one thing to claim you're a Christian but words are cheap. The question is simply, "Are you?" And all through this epistle, James is giving us tests to distinguish between the mere claim and the real deal.

- The first test was how you respond to trials, chapter 1.
- And then there was how you react to the Word of God. Are you a doer of the Word or only a hearer?
- And then how you respond to people in need. Do you have the true religion that reaches out to the fatherless and the widows, or do you demonstrate, as chapter 2 outlined, partiality toward some people? - And then there was that great and comprehensive test of works in chapter 2, verse 14, where James says if your faith is real, it'll prove itself in works, for faith without works is what? It's dead.
- And then there was the tongue in chapter 3, and the tongue is a test of true salvation, it's the heart that produces the vocabulary and the speech
- And then last week in chapter 3 there was the test of what kind of

wisdom that you exhibit. Is it the wisdom that is from above or is it the wisdom that is not from above which is earthly and sensual and demoniacal?

These are all tests. They are all methods of discerning genuine faith.

Now we come to chapter four and we get yet another indicator of true saving faith: how you deal with conflict.

James 4:1, What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

James says, “Listen, the reason you fight and quarrel is because you desire evil things.”

Your conflict on the outside is a result of evil desires on the inside. So presumably the solution to the outside problem is to resolve the inside problem.

Right? That would make sense.

Let me illustrate this INSIDE problem in a realm we can all easily

understand. About two weeks ago, I got out of bed and went into the bathroom. And Lisa was in the bedroom. It was early in the morning and nobody was up so it was really quiet. And she heard me say in a very concerned voice, “Oh no.”

And she kind of jumped up and said, “What’s wrong, Jason?” And I said “Oh nothing. I just stepped on the scale.”

So years ago I set what I call the 911 weight and when I reach that weight, the rule is I have to drop 10 pounds. So for the past 20 days I’ve basically been miserable trying to shed some of that weight that I don’t want.

Now how did that happen? The answer is I love evil foods. I have a desire for that which is not good for me. A giant slice of apple pie with a bowl of vanilla ice cream is literally a temptation created by the devil himself.

The evil passions on the inside have evil expressions on the outside.

And the only way to solve this outside problem is to solve the inside problem. My eating behavior on the outside is inextricably linked to my thinking behavior on the inside. To change the behavior one needs to change the desires. It’s the only way.

No Excuses

So knowing that our behavior comes from our desires, James begins by saying that the reason we fight and quarrel with one another is because of our evil desires. evil desires = evil behavior. Now he goes on further to describe those evil desires in further

detail.

James 4:2-3 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

What James is saying is pretty simple. What causes fights is you selfishly want something and you can't have it. That's like two year old theology. That's pretty stinking simple.

The Greek word there for desire is the word hedone from which we get our word hedonism. And the idea behind hedonism is that you want something to please yourself. Hedonism is living a life of self-pleasing.

- it's about your comfort
- it's about your convenience

The core idea of hedonism is self pleasure. It is the number one goal. Everything else has to be sacrificed upon that alter. So in a 1000 little ways, I always put my comfort and MY convenience ahead of other people around me. And it's that driving desire that is the source of our fighting.

No Excuses

Now if that's true, then the cause of your conflict is you. It's not the other person's fault. It's your fault. The text won't allow you to blame the other person. Remember the proverb? For lack of wood the fire goes out. Do you hear that? That's Solomon's way of saying, "Hey bro, it takes two to Tango."

If you are sinfully quarreling deeply with another person, that's a guaranteed slam dunk indicator that you are at fault.

Think about it. When we choose to eat the wrong foods, the problem isn't in the food we eat. You can't blame the food. If it wasn't so delicious, I wouldn't have eaten it. The food didn't make you do anything. The problem is the six inches between our ears. It's in us. The problem is we have unhealthy desires and we lost the internal war.

And so it is with our relational conflicts. We want to say, "Man that other person baited me. If they weren't like this, I wouldn't have responded like that." But it's just not true. Every time we sin in conflict it is because we have evil desires. Nobody ever makes you be sinfully angry. Sinful anger or frustration happens when that unhealthy desire in your own soul boils out in an opportunity.

Now as uncomfortable as that might be, James is still not done. It's actually worse yet.

James 4:4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Here's what's crazy. Ultimately, what he is saying and it's so painful to admit. It's so, so counterintuitive. The conflict is not between you and the other person. The conflict finally and ultimately is between you and God.

Ultimately, all human conflict is the result of a divine conflict. James is really trying to point out that your human conflicts are just symptoms of this spiritual sickness. Your relationship with God is completely jacked up. That's why your suffering on this horizontal level.

Notice that the evil desire that is causing all this conflict is called out in verse 4 - HERE IT IS: friendship with the world. There is an evil desire to befriend the world - to value what the world values.

And God makes it very clear that this is not okay. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. And it's not so

much that you are an enemy of God but that God is an enemy of you!

He says if you are a friend of the world, you are an adulterer. Spiritual adultery EQUALS friendship with the world which EQUALS loving the things the world loves. And so your problem with people is just symptomatic of your problem with God.

- How many of your conflicts really boil down to just wanting to be right?
- How many of your conflicts really boil down to this deep desire to be respected?
- How many of your conflicts really boil down to needing to prove yourself in some way or validate yourself or prove your worth in some way.

That's the desire that's really driving, driving, driving. Listen that's friendship with the world. That suddenly has very little to do with you and the other person. That's about you and God.

What this should do is cause us to step back a bit and evaluate how much the problems in our interpersonal relationships are really just evidence of our problems with God. This is one area where we suffer from severe blindness. Like very, very severe.

Imagine blowing up and getting angry at your spouse or a family member or another person in the church and you gossip about them behind their back and God comes to you and says, "Why are you having an affair? How could you be so hurtful to me?" And you think back over the course of the last week and you've got nothing. *You say to God, "What did I do? I thought we were good.* And he says, "Do you remember that conflict you had with your spouse?" And you say, "What does that have to do with you?"

And God looks you back, straight in the eye and says, “this has everything to do with you and I.”

We are blind to how our personal offense relates to God. Big time. It's the same blindness that a man has when he looks at pornography and tells his wife, “This has nothing to do with you.” Only a fool says that. It has everything to do with her.

Having an argument with another person does not seem like it's even remotely related to God. And yet God calls it's at the very center, at the very core, spiritual adultery. He calls it friendship with the world. It has everything to do with God.

Listen, it's the same principal when David sinned with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah in his Psalm of repentance in Psalm 51, he said to God, "Against you and you only have I sinned." Now on the surface, that is downright insulting to Uriah. What do you mean? I sure as heck would call sleeping with my wife and murdering me a sin against me. And yet, on a spiritual level, it's secondary. It's a symptom. That sin is just overflow evidence of the greater sin. Bathsheba and Uriah were collateral damage in the same way that an innocent pedestrian is the collateral damage of a drunk driver. All horizontal sin is ultimately sin toward God at the end of the day.

Think back on the conflicts you've had this week. Just apply this principle *Any time you get into a sinful argument, just say to yourself, “This is evidence of idolatry in my heart.* There's something wrong in my relationship with God that allowed me to get to this point where those words came out of my mouth.” That's very, very important.

Can you imagine if all our conflict resolution started there?

Now the solution that James points to is humility. And so here's our two point outline.

THE HUMBLE PATH OF PEACE

1. Humility is Repenting of Evil Desire
2. Humility is Drawing Near to God

I have done a lot of study in my life on humility; In fact, let me just take a few minutes here to boast about how much study I've done on humility. Honestly, I just mention the amount of study I've done just because I'm surprised at how elusive this concept is. Despite all my study, I really learned so much this week about the Bible's definition of the concept. It was almost like I had never even heard of the concept.

When you think of a humble person, we think of somebody who is shy and maybe not very self-assertive. Somebody who kind of sits back in the shadows and doesn't say much. Someone who doesn't powerfully lead.

That's not the picture at all. Let me prove to you that this is not God's picture of humility. Do you know who the Bible says is the

most humble person who ever lived? Moses.

Was Moses this little soft, weak person who never asserted or confronted in any way?

I want you to think about what Moses did when he went to confront Pharaoh. Moses went before the most powerful leader in the world, the most powerful figure in the world, and said, "I want you to give up your entire free labor force, which is the cornerstone of your economic and military superiority, right now, without remuneration, unconditionally, and immediately."

That's not the stereo type of humility is it? And you want to know what else is not very stereotypical? Do you know which book of the Bible says that Moses was the most humble man on earth? Deuteronomy. Do you know who wrote Deuteronomy? Doesn't that just instantly disqualify you from even being in the running.

What that tells me is we have the wrong concept of humility. Moses was not courageous and bold in spite of being humble. Moses was courageous and bold because he was humble. Do you know why? Because he REPENTED of sin and he DREW near to God. Show me your glory! He looked at all these people and he said, "I see my passion for God's glory. I see how beautiful God is. I see how lovely he is and I look around and I can honestly say," "I just want him way more than anyone else here does."

God's solution to conflict in this passage is humility and here's now he defines it. It's just two points. Repent of sin and draw near to God. Humility that produces peace can be reduced to those two points. Let's start with the first point.

THE HUMBLE PATH OF PEACE

1. Humility is Repenting of Evil Desire

Notice the first thing James says about humility here. Humility = REPENTING of evil desire.

Now the way this point is developed starts out on a very sad note. To the spiritually sensitive person this is a dagger to the chest.

James 4:5-7, Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us? 6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

What this passage is saying is I am jealous for your heart. I am jealous to be in that number one place in your soul. I want you to stop loving the world, to stop having an affection for the things of the world and I want you to love me.

Now what do you think of the fact that it says God is jealous for our affection. I'll tell you what this says. It says that's God's love is unbelievable.

Let me illustrate why this is so powerful. A wife does not want to be #6 in top ten most desirable women. She wants to be number one and she won't settle for anything less. And rightly so. But let's just say she discovers that her husband is having an affair, behind the scene.

She has one of two choices. If she reveals her jealousy she instantly becomes extremely vulnerable. She's, in a way, admitting that she's inferior. She's admitting that something else has beaten her out of that number one place, and she's jealous. She wishes she were that person because she wants to be the object of her husband's affection. That's a very risky thing to admit.

She does have a chance. What she's begging for is that if she displays her bleeding heart, her fierce jealousy, the idiot will come to his senses and come sobbing in repentance. And she says, "I think I can forgive." But it's such a risky move because there's another possibility. In exposing my jealousy, all it would take is one little word of comparison from her husband and it would just utterly destroy her. Utterly destroyed.

So because that is so risky, she has another option open to her. She can also just close her heart off. I'm not jealous. Are you

kidding. If he doesn't love me, then he doesn't deserve me. I'm out. You are dead to me, fool. Go set your affection on that goat. See if I care. I actually can't stand the thought of you setting your affection on me. You have lost your chance, buddy. I'm gone.

Do you see the choice?

So here's where I am going with this. The fact that God says that he is jealous of our affection, it sounds, on the surface almost weak. Isn't he putting the power in our hands. By admitting jealousy, isn't God putting in our hands the power to injure the omnipotent, all-powerful God?

Yes. It's really is an indication of his tremendous love for us. It's very vulnerable of him to say this. Even though we have spurned him time and time again, He hasn't closed himself off to us. Like a parent who continues to love their backtalking, snotty child, and willingly allows themselves to continue to be injured, God is just extending his love, knowing full well that he could be injured, yet again.

So lets now get real. When you have that sinful argument, when your anger comes out, James is tracing that back to a love affair you have with the world. It's not about you and the other person. It's about you and me. Come back to me. I am jealous of your affection. Stop loving that prostitute.

Now what is our response to a God who puts himself in this position? Answer. Humble yourself under the might hand of God. **HUMBLE YOURSELF.** Repent of this evil adulterous relationship.

Listen, no man can love his wife again, until he gives up that other. Until he entirely and completely purges that evil desire from his

heart. He has to repent of it. He has to, in effect, destroy everything she is to him in his mind. The adulterous woman has to be dead to him. It's the only way. She must die.

That's where humility begins. Everything the world means to me must die.

- If you love being respected, that must die. You must put away that mistress. A Christian wants God and God alone to be respected.
- If you love being powerful, if you want the freedom of riches, if you want to be beautiful so you can be the object of people's affection. You are having an affair with the world. Put away that mistress. That's God's place.

That must die. God must be first. There's a spiritual adulteress that must be put down. She must be dead to you. You can't say to God, hey sure, I love these things but calm down, I love you too.

You will either hate the one or love the other or you will be devoted to one and hate the other. A Christian can't serve two masters. You can't have two spouses. You can't love God and money, God and power, God and respect. By saying, "Can't I love both? That's how people end up in hell." God opposes the proud. God is an enemy of those kinds of people.

You have to repent. Look at the language used here.

James 4:8-10, Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

I want you to look at the command words here. He doesn't use any commands in chapter 4 until he gets here. I did a search on the commands in chapter 4

And I'll just show you this slide from my Bible software to illustrate this.

7 ὑποτάγητε οὖν τῷ θεῷ, ἀντίστητε δὲ τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ φεύξεται ἀφ' ὑμῶν, 8 ἐγγίσατε τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐγγιῖ ὑμῖν. καθαρίσατε χεῖρας, ἁμαρτωλοί, καὶ ἀγνίσατε καρδίας, δίψυχοι. 9 ταλαιπωρήσατε καὶ πενθήσατε καὶ κλαύσατε. ὁ γέλως ὑμῶν εἰς πένθος μετατραπήτω καὶ ἡ χαρὰ εἰς κατήφειαν. 10 ταπεινώθητε ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ ὑψώσει ὑμᾶς.

subject yourselves₂ therefore₁ to₃ God₄ resist₆ but₅ 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 lament and mourn and weep — laughter₂ [let] your₁ to₄ mourning₅ be turned₃ and your^a joy to gloominess humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you

These are all synonyms of repentance. God I mourn that I ever went after all these prostitutes. Forgive me. I weep when I see it. I mourn. That which used to bring me pleasure, now tears my heart out. I wail. I repent in dust and ashes.

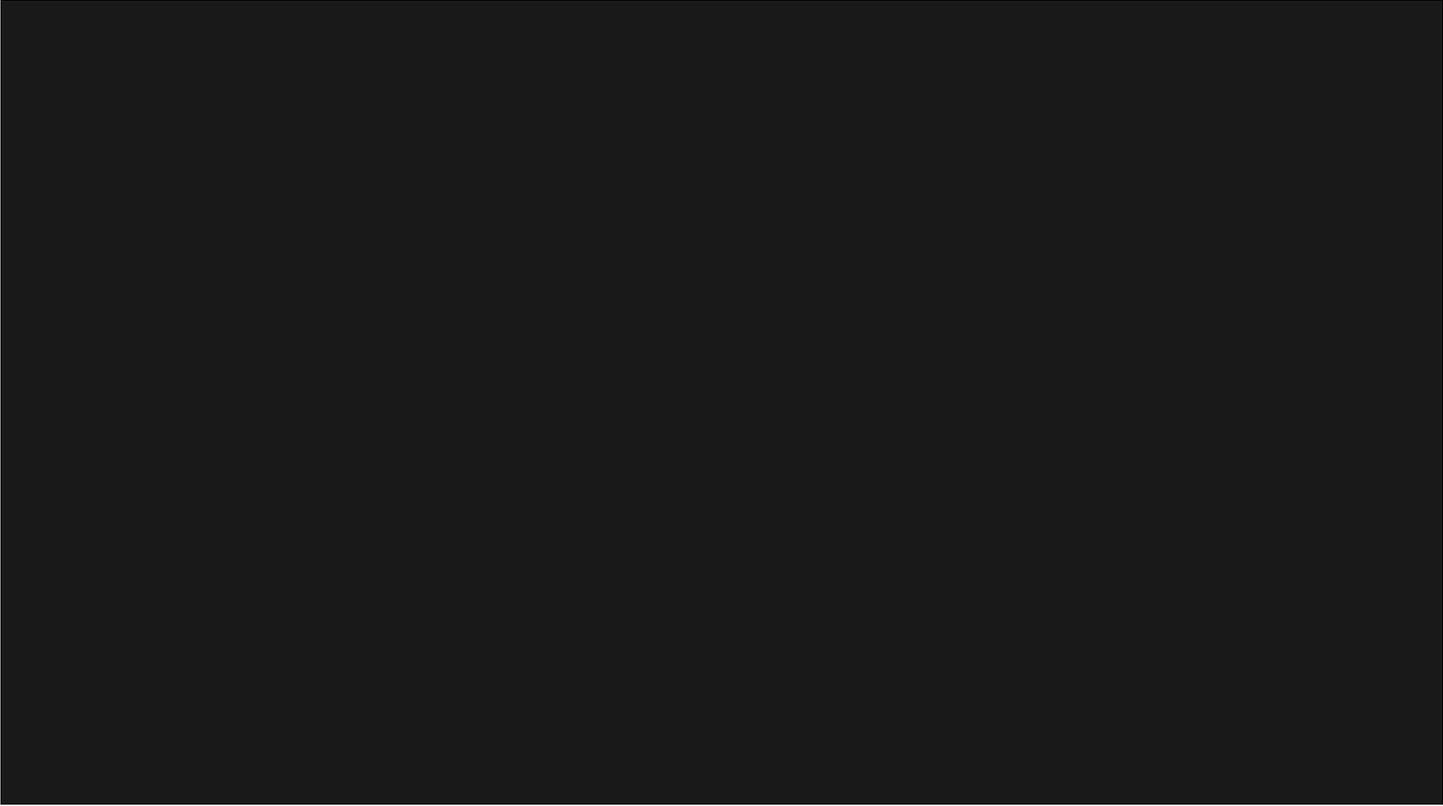
The path of peace with your neighbor is that kind of humility. Now the flip side of repentance is drawing near to God.

THE HUMBLE PATH OF PEACE

1. Humility is Repenting of Evil Desire
2. Humility is Drawing Near to God

The human machine must be pursuing something of beauty. You cannot abandon your current pursuit in exchange for nothing. You only abandon this one beautiful thing if you have something better to pursue. If you haven't eaten in four days and you're just absolutely starving and you are being offered McDonalds the only way you'd give that up is if someone offers you Red Robin.

Humility is just accepting God's invitation to find something better. Come to me. Taste and see that the Lord is Good. DRAW NEAR.



Draw near to me and see what Moses saw. Draw near to me and be satisfied. Stop pouring your life into broken cisterns that hold no water. You just pour and pour and invest and and invest and it just slowly drains away and disappoints. Why do you keep doing that? I know you're incredibly invested and it's hard to abandon everything you've invested. Cut your losses.

Drink from the spring of living water. When you Draw near to Christ, you see how beautiful he is. You see how lovely. You see how superior. Why would I ever go anywhere else when I have this?

This is humility, to admit that you've been entirely and totally in pursuit of the wrong thing your whole life. I'm a fool, but I'm happy to say that because now, finally I get the real thing. I get what I've been searching for my entire life!

Psalm 70-71

Psalm 70:4, May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore,
God is great!

Psalm 122-123

Psalm 122:9, For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

Application

What we've been trying to point out this whole time is that our human problems are really at the end of the day God problems.

We've tried to point out now for 40 minutes that all our human problems are just symptoms. The fighting and quarreling are symptoms.

It's obvious that this is James point because he starts out with our fighting and quarrelling and then he goes on for 10 VERSES and doesn't mention a single word about the other person. Doesn't mention a shred about how you are supposed to treat them. No commands whatsoever directed toward mankind. EVERYTHING HE SAYS is about repenting of your adulterous relationship with the world so that you can get back to loving the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind.

At the root of all our relational problems is our ultimate relational problem with God himself.

But what I want to do is kind of bring that full circle. What if you were not flirting with the world. What if God was number one in your life? How would that overflow in your relationships? Or to say it another way,

How would the holy passions on the inside have holy expressions on the outside.

What will that look like? Or to say it another way, what if you treated others the way God treated you?

You see instead of being a hedonist who says, "It's all about me." What if you were to instead say, "It's all about God." And I am going to show you God's love by giving you my life for you the way he gave his life for me.

Isn't that what God has done for us? God comes to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. He leaves his glory behind.

Romans 15

Romans 15:1-3, We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.

There's that Greek word again hedonism. Christ was not a hedonist. For even Christ did not please himself.

That's like the greatest understatement in the Bible; think about what Jesus did.

- He came to earth and he not only gave up his glory
- he gave up his power,
- and eventually he gave up his life for you,
- and he paid the penalty.

How could I ever be like Jesus in this way? Look at verse 6. He gives more grace. What does that mean?

- Jesus lived out verses 6. He drew near to God like nobody else on

earth. He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross.

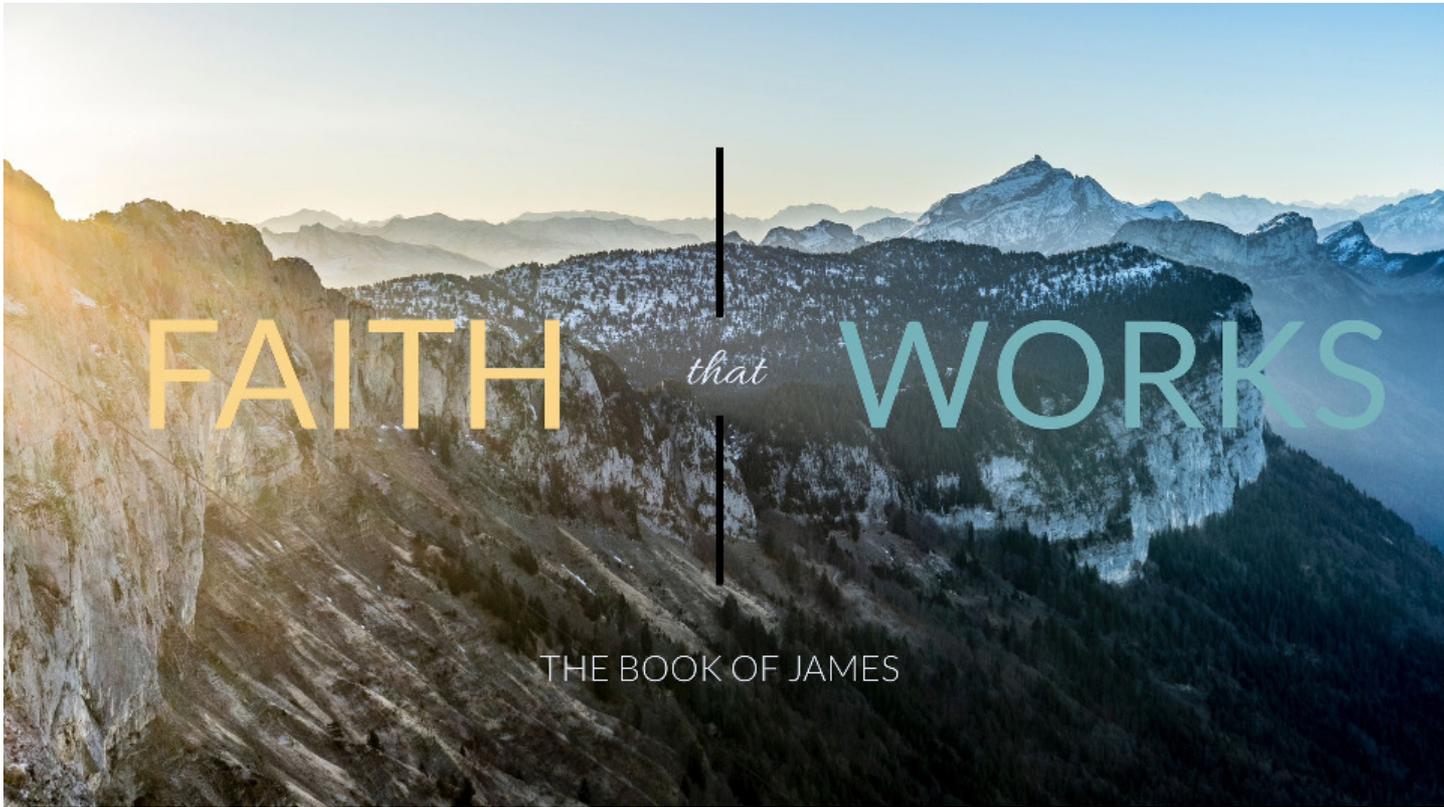
- Jesus lived out verse 7. He submitted to God. He resisted the Devil and the Devil fled from him.

And God credits that righteousness to you on the cross. The plan, all along, was for God to humble himself so that we could be exalted. That's grace. The more you understand that, the more secure you are in that, the more amazed you are in that, the more you will be able to be like that for others.

You will no longer be a hedonist who is trying to be happy by putting yourself first in this world. You are already happy in Christ and so are happy to be last like he was last. You'll be like a mother is to her child.

No child has ever received life without the laying down of his mother's life for months in bearing and nourishing him. She had to lay down her life for the child year after year in caring for him and training him and providing for him. We live only because someone else has lived by this principle, this laying down of the life.

- The Bible says, "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."
- So the last will be first, and the first will be last.
- Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.



FAITH *that* WORKS

THE BOOK OF JAMES