

MBC – 11/7/2021 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 JAMES: TESTS OF A LIVING FAITH
“Friend of the World = Enemy of God”
 James 4:1-10

Before we open up God’s Word this morning, I want to play just 3 minutes from a sermon given in 2002, in Montgomery, Alabama, by a relatively unknown speaker named Paul Washer. 5000 young people had gathered for a conference on evangelism. It had been a typical youth conference: lots of jokes and silliness, dancing and singing, games and skits. At the evening session the night before, the worship band rocked the house and the speaker cracked a lot of jokes, then gave an altar call and hundreds of kids came forward, still laughing, havin’ a good time.

The next morning the kids expected the same thing from this speaker: jokes, stories about his time on the mission field – but that’s not all what they got. Washer was upset about what he had seen the night before: There was no seriousness in these kids. He hadn’t seen any signs of repentance over their sins. The speaker had glossed over the Gospel, so what were they even responding to? (Play)

<https://www.facebook.com/TractPlanet/videos/2302506743106630/>

Let me give you the epilogue: After his message, there wasn’t much response. The event ended, Paul Washer went home, and that was that. Four years later someone uploaded his message to YouTube with the title “Shocking Message.” (Many of you have seen that.) It went viral, and within days, Washer’s ministry got thousands of emails and letters from all around the world from people saying they’d been saved by this shocking sermon.

Now turn with me to James 4:1-10. By contemporary church standards, this is a “Shocking Message.” How do jealousy, fights, quarrels and conflict get into our churches? James doesn’t blame the devil – or false teachers – or the world. He points the finger right at us and says, *“I’m talking about you!”*—

- James 4:1–10 ¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that *your* passions are at war within *you*? ²*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.
- ⁴You 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. ⁵Or 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”?
- ⁶But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Prayer: Father, You are talking about us in this passage – and You are talking to us. And we desperately need to hear what You say. And not take it lightly, and not take offense. You are admonishing us as a

loving Father warns His children. And You give us the way back if we have drifted – if we will listen to You and be doers of Your Word. You promise to give more grace and that’s what we ask for this morning.

V.4 is the heart of this passage—

- “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.”

James is talking about *worldliness* here: We will *define* that in a minute, but it’s so important that you notice: James doesn’t blame worldliness on the world! It’s not the world’s fault and it’s not the world’s problem – It’s their job description: “Be worldly!” James is saying to the person who names the Name of Christ: “I’m talking about you. You call Jesus your Lord? Then *you* - do not become *friends* with the world and act like the world and love what the world loves. If you do that, your faith is a phony.” I hope you understand: an enemy of God won’t go to heaven.

But don’t blame the world. 100 years ago you would have heard preachers come to this passage and preach against the evils of the world: card playin’, drinkin’, dancin’ and cussin’! Beloved the world is never going to change. The problem is not that the world is acting like the world, the problem is when *Christians* act like the world.

The source of worldliness is not out there. Where is it? Look with me at—

I. The source of worldliness. (v.1)

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

Where is the source of the problem? Right here (self) – it’s something inside, not outside.

You can’t *solve* a problem until you correctly diagnose it, right? And here, the Holy Spirit nail the diagnosis of our problems in the church with the wisdom from above:

- “*Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*”

“*Passions*” is the Gk. *hedone* - we get our word *hedonism* from this. It means pleasure-seeking, self-gratification, indulging our appetites, our greeds – picture a church pot-luck . . .

- Now God isn’t condemning our desires and appetites – He created us with them so that He could bless us by satisfying these desires and appetites – righteously, and within His will. But sin has corrupted our God-given desires, and the spirit of this world is to cast off all God’s restraints and pig out on whatever we want, whenever we want – even if it belongs to another!

And this should sound familiar. Turn with me back to—

- James 1:14 ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by – what? *his own desire*. The word here is the word for “*lust*,” a craving for something forbidden. James doesn’t blame the *bait*. He blames our sinful desires.

So James is talking to *Christians* here. He calls them *brethren*. The church. And within the church, we have a bunch of people who, when not led by the Holy Spirit, have a fleshly inclination to selfishly satisfy their own lusts and appetites: for power and control, the praise and acclamation of others, for *money*, – have you seen that happen in churches?

- And even to satisfy their sexual lust – all at the expense of others. (Not a week goes by that I don't read about some pastor or youth pastor accused of some disgusting sexual sin with someone in their church.)

*No wonder we have quarrels and fights, even in Christ's church! But where do these awful things come from? "*Within you.*" Not out *there*. In *here* (our own hearts). James will just not let us get away with blaming our circumstances, or other persons – including God, right? (James 1:13.) Instead, he keeps saying: "I'm talking about you." And then he gives some—

II. Symptoms of worldliness. (vv.2-3)

- James 4:2–3 ²You desire (lust) and do not have, so you murder.

Wait – really? We kill each other? Isn't he exaggerating? But didn't Jesus said that if you hate your brother you've already committed in your heart, right? And if you allow your lust free reign, and urge and opportunity come together, you are absolutely capable of murder to get what you lust after—

- Cain was jealous of his brother Abel, because God accepted Abel's offering and rejected his – so he murdered his only brother: "because his own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1Jn.3:12)

There are places where you could be murdered for your cell phone or your sneakers. But even in the church, people lust and do not have so they murder—

- In March of this year, Pastor David Evans of Harmony FreeWill Baptist in Oklahoma was shot and killed by his own wife – the pastor's wife – and her lover – after the three of them had been intimate. And I could tell you many more stories like this, but I won't.

The point is that the pull of our fleshly passions can drive us to things we would never imagine. And he goes on—

- "You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel."

That's literally, you are *jealous* – you are burning inside: you want some thing, some power or prestige, or maybe you want a person – that isn't yours to have – so you are at war with yourself: it's spiritual warfare – your old flesh against your new man, and the battle can be intense—

- Romans 7:21–24 ²¹So I find it to be a law (a principle) that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³but I see *in my members* another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

But James says that when you can't have what you want you fight and quarrel with *others* – what is the connection? It's this: When you are war with yourself, it's really hard to be at peace with others – right? Again – the problem isn't out there, it's in here.

- *I've counseled a lot of couples about their marriages – and many times they come in thinking that their problems are so complicated, but it always boils down to this: One or both “*desire and do not have, covet and cannot obtain. . . so they fight and quarrel.*” And that's a spiritual problem. And nothing will change until the Holy Spirit is given the reins again.

Turn with me to Gal.5 – many times I take couples to this passage where Paul gives the fruit of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit – i.e., what your home looks like when the flesh is in control vs. when the Spirit is in control. Let's read it—

- Galatians 5:16 (first I read:) ¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will *not* gratify the desires of the flesh. (Pretty clear – means just what it says.) So if you are selfishly gratifying the desires of your flesh, you have stopped walking in the Spirit – right? And this is what things will look like—
- Galatians 5:19–23 ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery (Gk. *pharmakeia* – drugs), enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²*But* the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control.

Then I ask the couple this question: “Which list sounds like your home – the fruit of the flesh or the fruit of the Spirit?” It's always the fruit of the flesh – otherwise they wouldn't be talking to me! Then I say, “So your problem really isn't really money, or a messy kitchen, or your overdrawn checking account: it's a *spiritual* problem – one or both of you are not walking in the Spirit, and the flesh has taken over. Scripture is so clear, isn't it?

And the solution is to repent of your selfishness, and yield again to the Holy Spirit's control through the Word, prayer, and fellowship in church. Because - when you walk by the Spirit, you will *not* gratify the desires of the flesh – *that's* biblical counsel!

Then James gives another reason for their strife and conflicts—

- You do not have, because you do not ask.

How often do you find yourself in some pity party, or you are angry, frustrated – and it hits you: you haven't prayed about it! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer – but *worldliness* destroys your prayer life. You don't seek heavenly things when your head and heart are obsessed with this world. And if you aren't on speaking terms with your heavenly Father because of your sins, you stop asking, so God stops answering.

- Ask yourself: “Am I taking everything to the Lord in prayer?” And if not, why not? What's crowding out prayer in your life? Something urgent? Nothing is more urgent than seeking God in prayer. Martin once said, “I have so much to do today that I'm going to need three hours in prayer to get it all done.”

- And if you think you *don't* need to pray – nothing comes to mind to pray about – you have a serious pride problem! You don't need God's all-sufficiency? That's acting like the world. Get on your knees and sing "I Need Thee Every Hour!"

But James goes deeper into our prayer lives—

- ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

When you slip into worldliness you might still pray, but it's the prayer of that self-righteous Pharisee in Jesus' parable: you are self-centered, self-glorifying, and self-serving, so of course, God won't give you what you ask for. And it's a good thing!

Aren't you glad that God is such a good Father that He doesn't give you what you ask for when you are out of it? Good Father's don't give their kids dumb stuff just because they ask for it.

But turn v.3 around: when you are walking with God seeking to please Him, confessing your sins, and hearing His voice in His Word, you are also praying constantly to Him, and you are going to get response from God—

- PSA 34:17 The righteous cry and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.
- PSA 145:18,19 The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.
- JAM 5:16 . . . The effective prayer of a *righteous* man can accomplish much.
- 1JO 3:22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

A righteous person will be praying for the things that God wants to give because he is in synch with God's own heart—so yes, he will get more of what he asks for.

*But if you are always asking, but never getting, take a spiritual inventory: Are you confessing and repenting of your sins? Are you seeking God's glory? Are you praying according to His revealed will?

Now don't lose your place in James, but I want us to turn to a passage that sheds light on what it means to be a friend of the world—

III. What it means to love the world – 1 Jn.2:15-1.

- 1 John 2:15–17 ¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Obviously, when John says "Don't love the world," he doesn't mean that we aren't to love *unbelievers* in the world – every unbeliever is your neighbor – and Jesus commanded us: "*Love your neighbor as you*

love yourself.” By *world*, he means the ungodly, satan-influenced world system: the world in rebellion against God; the world’s standards and values and idols. Love of the world means **love for earthly things, esteem for earthly values, and preoccupation with earthly cares.**

*If you are a child of God you have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son! How could you still love what the unsaved world loves – idolize its idols; or treasure what it treasures?

James called that friendship with the world. John said—

- ¹⁷. . . the world is *passing away* along with its desires (lusts), but whoever does the will of God *abides forever*—
- ***So worldliness is anytime you place more value on what is perishable than what is eternal.*** Earth is more important than heaven: Isn’t that how the world lives? When you live like that, you are following the world.
- The world turns everything of God upside down: I gave you a definition of worldliness earlier in our study of James: “*Worldliness is whatever makes sin look normal, and righteousness look strange.*” Isn’t that the spirit of this world that is anti-God and anti-christ?

*And we all nod our heads. But can I say that worldliness *sneaks* up on us? What was once unthinkable becomes thinkable, then doable, and finally acceptable – even respectable. It works like this: We’re attracted to some fad that the world is into –it’s not *necessarily* sinful – it’s just harmless fun . . . maybe it’s music, or movies, or sports, or Tik-Tok. Yeah, it might be harmless fun to us, but not to unbelievers who have turned it into an idol—

- I remember that after Michael Jackson died people were claiming that they had been healed by him, from the grave, like he was some sort of saint!

“Oh, we just love his albums,” but being naïve Christians, we just follow along with the world, (dope-de-dope) and before we know it, we’re doing all the same stuff the world is doing, and we *are* “*loving the things of the world!*” And we can get ourselves just as trapped in idolatry as they are—

- I will never forget going into the home of a family from our church and there was an actual *shrine* to some football player: it had a portrait of the football player, his jersey, and other stuff. I asked them about it, and they just laughed – Oh, yes, they were *huge* fans, but the shrine was just a joke. Yeah, but they still had a *shrine* . . . in their home. . . that sure looked just like the shrines to Mary I saw in Mexico, or the shrines to Hindu gods I saw in India. And they joked about being idolaters?

One more example: patriotism is a good thing. Christians should be good citizens – but some unbelievers turn patriotism into a religion and an idol – you know that. But it can creep into the church: I know a pastor who removed the American flag from his church, because it was right next to the cross behind his pulpit! And it hit the fan – some people left the church. He stood his ground. He told them, “I love our country, I love our flag, but we are here to worship God – not America.” He was right. When he left his church, they put it back!

But John gives a three-fold description of worldliness here that is so clear, in v.16—

1. **The (desires) lust of the flesh** is everything that appeals to our sensual appetites and our craving for pleasure. Again, some of those desires are not sinful in themselves, but they *become* sinful when we make an idol out of them, and satisfying those desires becomes more important than loving and pleasing God. Someone said that an idol is something you are willing to sin to have!
 - Eve succumbed to the lust of the flesh in the Garden, didn't she? "*The woman saw that the tree was good for food.*" Satan tempted Jesus with the lust of the flesh in the wilderness: "I know You are hungry, Jesus – turn these stones into bread!" Never, ever underestimate the pull of your own flesh! Are you willing to sin to satisfy your desires?
2. **The (desire) lust of the eyes** is everything that appeals to the eyes. It's materialism – a craving to have more stuff, better stuff – and more and better stuff than your next-door neighbor's stuff! Man, does that cause problems? Satan tempted Eve with this in the Garden: She stared at that forbidden fruit and saw that "*it was a delight to the eyes!*" And the devil did the same with Jesus when he "*showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.*"
3. **The pride of life** is just what it sounds like: boastful pride in what you have accomplished. I just read Daniel 4 where old king Nebuchadnezzar was on his roof, surveying his kingdom and said, "Is this not Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" God didn't like that! He 'put him out to pasture,' if you know the story.

Eve fell for this temptation too: "she saw that the tree was desired to make one wise," and again, Satan tempted Jesus with jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple to show off His power.

*And Satan still tempts us in these same 3 areas, doesn't he? His tactics never change. Some have thought that these temptations represent the stages of life: e in our youth, he tempts us with the *lust of the flesh*, in our middle years it's more *the lust of the eyes* – materialism. And in our senior years it's that boastful pride of life: picture older folks sitting in their rockers, bragging about their lives and accomplishments. Personally, as a senior myself, I can tell you that the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life *never* go away.

Now turn with me back to James to see his—

III. The sentence of condemnation. (vv.4-5)

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

Friendship with the world is spiritual adultery in the sight of God. Wow. The Jews knew what that meant, it's all throughout the OT. God called Israel His wife. He had betrothed Himself to her. She was His covenant bride. And when she rejected Him to worship the false gods of the pagan nations, that was just like adultery – think of the story of Hosea and Gomer. Read Ezekiel 16 – and it is an R-rated description of Israel's spiritual adultery. James' readers got this.

How much more for the Christian: “From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride, with His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died” – so for a Christian, to betray Jesus to have an affair with the world – is like *adultery*. Let that sink in. It should make our blood run cold.

*Beloved, some of us play way too close to the edge: “Oh I know I was getting too serious with the world, but we broke up – we did –now we’re just going to be *friends*.” And James says—

- “whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

*Beloved, God’s enemies don’t go to heaven. James is warning us, saying, “if you stay on this path, you are on the path to hell.” Thank You, God, for warning us!

- Jesus said you can’t serve two masters because you will always love one and hate the other. And believe me, the world seeks to master you, and rule over you. But if Jesus saved you, you belong to Him, body and soul. And if you are His beloved Bride, what are you doing, dating the world? The world didn’t die for you – but Jesus did.

This all sounds so much like what we read in the OT doesn’t it? Israel would serve God for awhile, then turn back to worship false gods. God would punish them to draw them back. He was always faithful to them even when they were unfaithful to Him. And so while God’s people are flirting with the world, He seeks to bring them back. That’s what James says in—

- James 4:5 ⁵Or 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”?

Let me paraphrase this: “*God, who gave us His Holy Spirit, yearns, He longs for us to be filled and controlled by the Spirit.*”

So James was saying, “This is the solution to your arguments and quarrels and all the garbage that come when you seek the gratification of your flesh: be controlled by the Spirit who indwells you.” Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh!”

- Instead of fighting and conflict, disorder and every vile thing, there will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Do you see it? Our Father has given us everything we need to escape the clutches of worldliness, if we will just humble ourselves and allow the Spirit to control our lives. What is the very next thing James says, in v.6? “He gives more grace!” God’s grace is greater, stronger, than anything the world, the flesh, or the devil can throw at us – beloved, if God is for us, who can be against us?

Maybe you are thinking, “Yeah, but I can see that I’ve really blown it. I’ve been a friend of the world.” Well, “where sin abounds, grace much more abounds!”

Next week we are going to look at vv.8-10 where God tells us how to come back to Him if we have drifted – I want you to read over these verses this next week – do it prayerfully, and see how God uses it in your own heart. He gives more grace.