

Why do we fight.
James 4

Proverbs 3:27-35
Job 27:1-12

(READ JAMES 4)

We are starting James 4 this morning, making our way rather quickly to the end of this book. The focus of this book so far has been mainly how do we who are Christians live in this world? How do we conduct ourselves in this life through our trials, through temptation, through our speech, and our actions.

Now having gone through most of this book, I think it is sad that this book is not taught more today. For I think its message of what true faith looks like needs to be taught. The misconceptions about this book teaching the idea of a works salvation is unfortunate, for I think there is so much that we have gleaned as we have gone through this. James' writing here, I think helps to make our faith feel more tangible, rooted in the idea of the out word working of our faith, and what true faith looks like. IF you try to separate faith, from works you will begin to make all sorts of errors. Your faith becomes about your emotions, how things feel to you. And while our faith does have an emotional element attached to it, our emotions are not the guide of our faith.

We are not Christians because we feel like we are, in fact throughout my life there have been times where I haven't felt like I was. I have gone through moments of doubt, questioning my faith asking myself do I truly believe scripture and what it says, or am I just going through the motions of attending church, acting like a christian, choosing to be moral, or am I really a Christian. During the hardest struggle I had with this was when I learned of the doctrines of grace and it caused me to question my salvation because up to that point my faith was something I chose to have, I had convinced myself that I decided to follow Jesus,

After wrestling with this for quite a while I told myself, well I guess being worried about it so much kinda proves that it is real. Then I remembered scripture saying that God provides for his people and that we should not worry, so then my thought became...well God is sovereign, and if my faith is not real, if the decision I made ends up not counting for anything there isn't much I can do about it, then the light bulb went on, I see now.... this faith that I hold isn't mine, I didn't just decide to follow Jesus because it was the smart thing to do, or out of fear of dying, nor did I decide to follow Jesus because that was what I was brought up to do. I follow Jesus because he gave me the faith to believe, the ability to call upon him and seek forgiveness. I am not who I am because I was raised in the church, I am not who I am because I decided on my own have faith in Jesus, I am who I am because of Christ, and his grace and mercy, granting me faith, and a new birth.

This tangible, real faith, at time causes me to make choices against what is for my best interest, or my own selfishness or pride. This faith that works in me when my selfishness comes up and says I don't want to help that person, or I don't want to study this week but then the holy spirit works conviction in my heart, and what I did not want to do, becomes something that I have to do.

This is the faith that James is talking about, one that acts out in ways contrary to ourselves. We have become new creatures, and these new creatures are different then the old. They no longer look to self for answers, but rather look to Christ. Christ in us, transforming us into his image, working in us to will and to do his good pleasure. The key is the doing, as James said words can be empty, you can

claim to have faith all you want but unless your life shows it your faith is not real, it is dead, and you are tricking yourself.

This whole book has been like a guide, or rather a descriptor of Christian Faith. As we enter here into chapter 4 it seems to have taken a start change. Some commentators say that James has switched topics, has moved on to something different. But I do not think that is actually the case. As I said last week, he has been building a chain, one link at a time, each building upon the last, There are parallels here in this chapter to the previous chapters, verse 3 he says, "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Back in Chapter 1 he said if any man lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him, but let him ask in faith with no doubting for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea being driven by the wind.

We ask, and do not receive because we ask amiss...we ask for things for our pleasure when we should be seeking Godly wisdom, and Godly understanding, in our situation. It isn't wrong to seek and ask for deliverance during a time of trial, or tribulation but we should guard ourselves that we are asking rightly. That we are seeking God's will, and not our own desire, and God will grant us wisdom, strength and patience as he promises.

Another parallel I see is in verse 6, when he says quotes proverbs, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. This is exactly the same thing he was saying at the end of chapter 3, Wisdom of the world is proud, it is puffed up, it seeks its own desire, but the wisdom that comes from God is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits. He has already pointed out how faith working in us produces these things, Godly wisdom, peace, love, joy, mercy and then he starts out chapter 4 saying Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have, You murder and covet and cannot obtain, You fight and war. You have not sought after godly wisdom which brings peace, instead you have sought the world, which is proud, and seeks its own desire.

The tone has changed, and I think this gives us a view into why this letter was written. James has built up his argument as to what a Christian life should look like, and then says, why do you war and fight? Why do you murder and covet? The commentary I was reading made mention of a possibility that arguments within the churches he was writing to was leading to physical violence. Back a few weeks ago when we started this book we went over the likely date of its writing, and during that time a group of Jews calling themselves Zealots were a very violent group seeking to purify Judaism. It is for this reason that some believe that those to whom this letter was written may have actually been in violent conflict with each other that some of these members may have been converted Zealots who were reverting back to their old ways to get what they desired. Which I thought was an interesting view, but it is not the most common view. Most seem to believe that James isn't talking about physical wars between groups within the church, but rather using the term metaphorically. Which really fits better I think with the rest of this book.

As I was thinking upon this I thought that the words James used were quite harsh if it was to be taken metaphorically. IF there was not physical violence going on then why does James use the phrase, Why do you murder? Then I remembered the sermon on the mount, when Jesus says, If you are angry at your brother without a cause you commit murder. I think that this is likely what James meant by calling them murders. He had finished laying out his argument for a working faith, a true faith and then calls them out here in chapter 4 on their actions. Earlier in chapter 2 he said, You claim to have faith,

show me your faith by your works...your works are murder, lust, coveting, a Waring between yourselves, you are not showing a faith that is from God,

If we keep that in mind as we go to verse 3 he says you ask and do not receive because you ask amiss. I think it is the same thing, as we saw in the parallel in chapter 1, if you ask in faith, God will grant you wisdom, and every good gift. Here in chapter 4 he says you ask that you may spend it on your pleasures. These people are not seeking God's will, they are not seeking Godly wisdom, and understanding, they are seeking their own gain.

James goes on in verse 4 and calls these people Adulterers, and Adulteresses! These are not people who are committed to their father God, but rather seek things of this world and operate under a motive of selfishness, and greed.

There is 2 ways that we can look at this harsh language that James uses here. We can either understand it in a way that he is talking to fellow Christians who have left their first love, Christ, and are focusing on self yet go back to Christ when it is convenient for them or when they need something much like a person in an adulterous relationship. Or it could be the opposite, people who are not actually Christians but acting as such even though they are full of selfishness, and pride seeking their own will and pleasures.

I think it really could be understood either way and it is hard to know exactly in which way James is meaning it here but in the context of this book I think that it is likely he is talking to people he believes to be christian brothers who have been caught up in the snares of the world. Up until this point this book has pointed to the positive, if you are Christs, then you will be like this and here we see the negative and I think really the focus and reason of his writing this letter. It seems that there is much trouble in this group that he is writing too and he starts by setting forth examples and expectations of a person of faith in the first 3 chapters and now has shifted a toward rebuking and calling out people who are not showing forth the work of one who is claiming to be in Christ.

We see that further here in verse 4 He continues on to say, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? This is why I think when he is referring to them as being adulterers, and adulteresses that he is actually talking to those he believes are his brothers and sisters but have fallen away, they have been caught in the snare of worldly lust and desire. We must remember that James was a pastor, and as we said in the introduction to this book, it is believed that it is written to those who have gone out from the Jerusalem church trying to escape persecution.

In these verses I think we can easily pick up on a feeling of frustration and concern for these people who he once pastored. He is calling them out, and not mincing words. You who are committing adultery against your brothers and sisters Seeking the pleasures of this world, do you not know that doing so makes you an enemy of God?

We also need to remember that it is believed by many commentators that James is dealing with reports of people who have taken Paul's teaching to far. Taking Paul's teaching of free grace to the point that since Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone that they don't have to do anything. They can live as they desire, since Christ paid for their sins and it is his righteousness applied to them and not their own.. it doesn't really matter what they do. I think in this context, we can understand this part of chapter 4. After James has shown them what the life of a true believer should look like rebukes them, and warns them and brings them to the scriptures.

Verse 5, he says.. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?” As Paul said in Romans that by the Spirit we cry out Abba Father. The holy Spirit indwelling in us yearns jealously within us to do the will of our father. If we in our own selfishness, and arrogance suppress the holy spirit and go against it we become like those James is writing to and have become adulterers and adulteresses leaving aside our true love Christ, and seeking our own pleasures.

This ought not to be, just as chapter 3 said, does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter water from the same opening? Or does a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs. If the spirit is in us, we need to guard against suppressing it in our own unrighteousness and selfish desires. We need to seek wisdom from God and get understanding, we need to be in prayer, be in the word and growing in grace, and understanding so that we will not fall into the snares of this world, and of the devil.

After James rebukes them, and warns them, and paints this picture of rebellion, and unfaithfulness he says... But God gives more grace, he resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Despite our failures, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness Gods grace abounds even more. How marvelous is this grace, given to us who deserve punishment. There are times when we too get tied up into the concerns and cares of this world, we seek after our own selfish desires and we don't seek Godly wisdom. But thanks be to God for his grace! That he gives to us.

James says that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Gods people, his true people are a humble people. As James said at the end chapter 3 about the wisdom from God, It is pure, peaceable, gentle and willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. God's people are humble people because we know that it isn't by our merit that we have been adopted, we didn't pay the adoption fee making ourselves a part of Gods family...Christ did.

After his rebuke, James calls them back to repentance, verse 7, submit to God, and Resist the devil. Do not be proud, do not seek our own desires but rather submit to God and seek his wisdom and his desire for your life. God resists the proud, gives grace to the humble Therefore submit to God, Resist the devil and he will flee from you. James is calling these people back to repentance, and we too, should do the same when we fall away, seeking our own desires, Submit to God, Resist the devil, do not be proud, but rather be humble draw near to God and he will draw near to you.