

Draw Near to God

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[0:00] One of the certain realities of the Christian life is that God's people are simultaneously saints and sinners at the same time.

In other words, we are saints who sin. And so for those of us who have put our trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we belong to God.

He has saved us. He set us aside as saints, but we still sin. Now, if we truly belong to Christ, we do not sin as those who belong to Christ in the same way that we did prior to coming to Christ.

One thing, we should be convicted by sin, and there should be a hatred in our hearts for sin. But the reality is that we still sin.

And sadly, sometimes our sins identify us as more belonging to the world than being the people of God.

[1:37] And not only do we see this contradicting reality in life, we also see it in the pages of Scripture. And we, this morning, come to one of those places in Scripture where this is the case.

And it is in James chapter 4, verses 1 through 10. So if you'd like to turn there, would you turn to the book of James chapter 4.

And our intention this morning would be directed to verses 1 through 10. If you are using one of the church's Bibles, it's on page 1012.

James chapter 4. This is 1 through 10. These words this morning are especially timely as we prepare for three days of prayer and fasting.

I pray that the Lord will use them to prepare our hearts for this time. The very most women of James chapter 4.

[3:01] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are of war within you?

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

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.

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?

[4:11] But it gives more grace. Therefore, it says God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw more to God, and he will draw more to you.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you devil-minded.

Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your life to be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts before you this morning in reading.

Thank you for your word. My prayer is that we would use your word to speak to our hearts. And you cause us to respond to your word today.

[5:25] And we should. We especially ask that we would use these words as a foundation for the time of prayer and fasting that we in a few hours in the church would embark upon.

Increasingly. Increasing. Increasing. Amen. These words of James are both convicting and encouraging.

But before they will truly encourage us, they really need to convict us. James is challenging us about the reality of grovelness in the lives of the people of God.

And he calls us to repentance. And as we prepare for our time of prayer and fasting, I believe it is very fitting that we contemplate these words.

I think we all admit that these words are stinging. These words are also hopeful. And here's the hope that I trust that we would find, all of us who belong to Christ this morning, wherever we find ourselves, however convicted we may be, I pray that this is the encouragement that we will find this morning and that we will find this week as we engage in praying fasting.

[7:04] As we draw near to God, he will draw near to us. And our lives will be marked more by godliness than by worldliness.

I'm not going to be wrong this morning. This is the promise that we have this morning. that if we will draw near to God, God will draw near to us.

And brothers and sisters, God cannot draw near to us. Without our lives, we will mark more by godliness than by worldliness.

I'm not going to be wrong this morning. I've built this sermon this morning around two single words. I have two single points. Two simple points and two single words. And the first word is worldliness. This passage calls us to renounce worldliness.

[8:13] It calls us to see it for what it is and to renounce it. But worldliness is one of those words that's defined in a lot of different ways, depending on who you're talking to.

I grew up in a very legalistic Pentecostal church, and worldliness in that church and in that denomination, was largely defined by externals.

It was defined by how one dressed, the kind of hairstyle one had, and the entertainment choices one engaged in.

And I'm thankful for that church. I came to know Christ as a young boy at the age of 12 because of that church. But worldliness was an external thing.

It was the trappings of the tangible. But what we see as we consider this passage this morning is that worldliness is so much more than that.

[9:17] Certainly those things can be some indication of worldliness, but not exactly or not with any accuracy that we can depend on.

Worldliness at its core is a hard issue. And that's what we see in this passage this morning. James not only defines worldliness for us, he describes it for us.

In this form, he defines worldliness from a heart perspective, and what he says is, it is friendship with the world. It is an affinity with the world.

It is a coziness with the world, and the things in the world. It is an allowance of our affections to be aligned with the world when they should be rightly aligned with God, and God alone.

And so, James calls people who are friends with the world adulterous people. And that's strong language. Now, clearly the world that James is talking about is not the physical, natural world.

[10:35] Instead, what he has in view is the moral, spiritual world, which is fallen humanity, organized in rebellion against God, in their behavior, in their attitudes, and in their values.

It's the world out of which God called his people. Listen to the words of Jesus, contending what is called the late high priestly prayer, where he prayed for all of his disciples who would ever believe. He says these words in verses 14 and 16, I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

The prayer of Jesus is that as we live in the world, we will not be of the world. We will not be partakers of the world. We will not have affections for the world.

[11:48] Our values will be different from those of the world. And Jesus tells us that it is possible to be in this world, and not of this world, as he himself was in this world, and not of this world.

And in order for us really not to be of this world, we have to see it for what it is. We have to remove the veneer of what it appears to be, and see it for what it truly is.

Friends, when we see the world as it truly is, we don't want to be friends with it. When we see the world as it truly is, we don't want to distance ourselves from it. We don't want to get cozy to it. And one of the greatest things we need to see of this world is no matter how glamorous, no matter how flattering, Satan is the god of it.

Satan is the god of this world. Now before James gives us this description of, or this definition of weirdness that we find in verse 4, he gives us an example of weirdness that we find in verses 1 through 3.

[13:16] It's an example we're all familiar with. Sadly, it's an example that I think we are too familiar with. It's an example of quarreling.

It's what James calls, sorry, it's what we as Bahamians call rallying. So think of your last argument. Some of us have moved in this morning. Maybe it was with a husband or wife or with a child. Maybe it was a brother or a sister.

Maybe it was with a co-worker. Imagine James asking us why we were quarreling. And I think, true to form, we would all get into the nitty-ditties of what happened and who said what and who did what and how the argument came about.

And I think James would get to the core of it and say, no, that's not why we were quarreling. That's not why we were arguing.

[14:29] James gives us this explanation in verses 1 through 3. He says, fundamentally, we argue and we quarrel because we would become friends of the world. We've adopted ways of behavior, ways of responding.

the way the world moves and the world responds. The world murders and the world fights and the world quarrels. Then we cannot get things to be the way they want them to be.

And James says that we have adopted those particular ways and that's why we act the way that we do.

He even says that when we pray, when we're praying to God, we should be asking Him to intervene.

He says, our hearts are going to be motivated. And we pray and we don't receive what we pray for. And he says, it's all because of weariness because we have become so close to the world, manifesting its behavior and conduct and attitudes.

[15:49] And so this is the outcome that we have. We have quarreling and fighting. And it's all to try to bring about the desire and the result that we want. Rather than entrusting the situation with God, entrusting the Lord to work in the midst of it, we try to have our own room.

We resort to quarreling and fighting and later rather figuratively or with our lips or literally with our hands.

Now to be clear, James is not in any way prohibiting disagreements because disagreements are just a part of life.

For all kinds of different reasons, we have disagreements because we're different people, we have different perspectives and we can disagree on things but I think we all know that we can disagree without quarreling.

We can disagree without getting on the other person's throat and fighting. And one of the ways that we can disagree without getting to that point is that we learn how we are to entrust situations to the Lord rather than trying to change them ourselves.

[17:11] We entrust Him to the Lord, trusting Him to work in His time and in His way. If we don't do that, we resort to try to make it happen.

How do we want it to happen and when we want it to happen and we can become engulfed in our passions that drive us to fighting and quarreling and even to murder.

And as we're playing this sermon, I was convicted of one of the rules that we sometimes can be very much like the world and that is in the way of competing.

Sometimes we're not arguing and fighting but we find ourselves complaining and what we're complaining about ultimately is the providence of God and the circumstances of God that is allowed to be in our lives and we find ourselves complaining and we're convictedly of a particular situation that I have just been complaining in an ongoing way.

That's the world's way. The way of the people of God is to trust the Lord, the one who comes here in our heads, the one who orders our steps, that his boundary lines in our lives have fallen in

pleasant places and we learn to trust him even when we can't see how he is at work or what he is doing.

[18:55] And sometimes the fundamental way that God is at work is he is at work causing us to trust him in situations that we'd rather be different. We'd rather change and change quickly.

It must come as a surprise in verse 4 when James moves from talking about quarreling and fighting and he says, new 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. This must be surprising when we see it because we're like where did that really come from?

And what James is introducing here is helping us to see that the reason we can introduce these words of unfaithfulness is because we really do belong to God.

And so that's the encouragement. The encouragement is despite being with you, despite the connection, we are people of God who are conducting ourselves as if we don't belong to God.

[20:14] And James says, when you act like that, we're the true and real relationship to the Lord. We're becoming friendly with the world. And I think we can all, especially those of us who are married, can kind of imagine how James is employing this language.

Imagine our spouse becoming overly friendly with someone and we observe what we understand to be a sharing of affection.

A sharing of feelings that really ought to be exclusively towards us. And James is saying when we act in ways that are like the world and we are aligned with the world, he says, it is a dauntless conduct.

It is a betrayal of our love and our affection for the Lord. But again, though this is a correction, it is also an encouragement.

We belong to the Lord. So first, we need to hear the correction so that we can truly benefit from the encouragement.

[21:44] In verse 5, James says that God mourns jealously over the spirit that he has caused to dwell in us. He's a jealous God.

One of God's names is jealous. He's jealous over his people, jealous over those whom he has redeemed. And so what we see in this brothers and sisters is worldliness is no small thing.

Worldliness is not an okay thing. Floating with the world is never okay. And so this morning as we consider these words of James, what do you see in your own life, in your own heart, conduct and affections that are controlled to the life that you're called to live as a Christian, as one of the most of Christ?

Is it in the area of quarreling and not governing your passions? Is it by not praying to God and trusting God instead of taking matters into your own hands and trying to make them happen, how you want them to happen, when you want them to happen?

as you're being entertained by the world, and instead of things that should convict your heart, you find yourself entertained by them.

[23:22] These are all important for us to think about. And we should not this morning dismiss any conviction that the Lord brings to our heart and say, well, I'm a Christian, because as a Christian, sometimes I can behave like an unbeliever, but I'm still a Christian.

We should never try to draw comfort from that kind of behavior. And the reason is that there are many who profess Christ and don't truly possess Christ, and they are regenerate.

The danger in that kind of behavior is that we can actually be unregenerate and think that we are regenerate.

And so we should avoid that kind of conduct altogether. we should never take comfort in the fact that a person can be a believer and still manifest conduct of unbelievers.

We should never take that as a right thing. It's very, very seriously, brothers and sisters, that we should never take a right thing. And so for all of us who profess to know Jesus Christ this morning, we need to consider whether our lives are aligned with Christ or aligned with this world, and we need to determine where we truly stand.

[24:59] We need to evaluate where we truly stand. Do we belong to Christ or do we belong to the world? And again, the danger of worldliness is that it can fool us into believing that we belong to Christ when we belong truly to the world.

And so we must turn from worldliness and we must pursue godliness. And this points in my second and third point. And not a single word about what is godliness.

We're called to pursue godliness. We're called to renounce worldliness but we're called to pursue godliness.

And how do we do that? How do we renounce worldliness and pursue godliness? Well, James tells us in verse 6, notice what he says, that he gives more grace.

Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the holy. That is the way that we pursue godliness. We don't pursue godliness by trying to find it within ourselves to be better and to be better.

[26:19] No, we pursue godliness by looking to God for the grace that he provides. And with that grace and by that grace we pursue godliness.

We renounce worldliness and we pursue godliness and God gives grace. And I like the way that James says that James gives more grace. Because I think we would all acknowledge sometimes we just need more grace.

We need more grace to make the changes to turn our back of worldliness and to turn our faces to god and to pursue godliness.

We need grace to do that. We need something out of this world. We need something from god. An endowment, an enablement, a motivation. We need god's grace to remove the scales off of our eyes and define that the things that we are being drawn towards are not worthy things.

We need god's grace to see the beauty of christ and the beauty of the things of god and that we are attracted to them. Left to ourselves we will never see. He gives grace.

[27:39] And the grace that he gives us, James tells this in verse 4, is a grace to submit to god. It is a grace to submit to god rather than to do our own way and do our own thing and take matters into our own hands and give people a peace of our mind.

What it means is instead of exhibiting pride and alarming with the world, we pursue godliness and we exhibit humility.

we submit to god. And so for example it means that in these situations that James has already identified for us instead of quarreling, we submit to god.

We submit to his will and to his will to live life in his terms. Next in verse 7, James tells us and we are to resist the devil and the promises he will flee from us.

And I want you to see these two parallel promises that we have. In verse 7, we're told resist the devil and he will flee from you.

[29:06] In verse 8, we're told draw near to god, he will draw near to you. These are mutually exclusive circumstances. When we resist the devil, he frees from us.

When we draw near to god, god draws near to us. And we can rest assured that when god is drawn near to us, the devil is nowhere in sight pursuing us.

And that's what we're called to do. We're called to submit to god, resist the devil, God. He's the one who tempts us. He's the one who tempted the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the word of the Lord Jesus resisted the devil was with the word of God. And this is why we're doing Sunday by Sunday and during the week hopefully in memorizing God's word and hiding it in our hearts is because we don't want to sing against the Lord.

And it is that word that is going to be the defense that we have where we can say Satan I resist you, get behind me, as the Lord Jesus himself did.

[30:22] We'll say it again, join out to God. The promise is he will join you to us. And James further tells us how to join out of God.

He says calm your hands, purify your heart. What does he mean by cleansing our hands? James doesn't specify, but essentially what he's saying is he's saying you know that you're doing wrong, you know that you're using your hands to actively engage in, he says stop it, cleanse your hands from that.

He says purify your hearts. He's saying to us, you know the thoughts of your hearts, you know the deliberations and the meditations of your hearts, purify your hearts.

Now again, how do we do this? We do this by the grace of God provides. God gives us grace to do this. So we can do this. Because of the grace of God provides to us.

We purify our hearts by repenting and by turning away from thoughts so we know we're not pleasing to God. And James tells us that when we see these things as we ought to see them, he says the result is we would be wretched, we would mourn, we would weep, and laughter would be turned into mourning and a joy to God.

[32:02] This is the language of conviction. this is the language of seeing our sin as we ought to see it. Brothers and sisters, sin is never a casual or a light thing.

Our sins send Jesus Christ to the cross and the death that he died shows us the hideousness of sin. And we all ought to be praying, God, help me to see my sin the way I ought to see it. Help me to be relieved by my sin. Help me to feel wretched over my sin. Help me to look more over my sin and to leave over my sin. And help me not to be entertained by that which should grieve my heart.

The language of repentance is a call from a double-minded fence-sitting kind of movie. Where we have one foot in the world and one foot in serving the Lord, having a divided heart, James says that we ought to turn away from that.

Turn away from double nakedness. And in a singular way serve the Lord. God has given us means by which we can do these things in an ongoing way.

[33:33] Not just because we're going to do praying and fasting over the next few days, but these are ongoing means of grace that God has given to us. These are means by which God brings grace to us to enable us to live in this way.

And the primary ones is His Word. Living it, hearing it preach as we are this morning, prayer and fasting, these are means of grace that God has given to us that we're able to pursue godliness and forsake!

Godliness is a means by which we're able to draw near to God. and distance ourselves from the devil and the world in which he is God.

Brothers and sisters, the call to draw near to God is a call to see our true condition, to see where we are compromising, to see where we are living in ways that we ought not to be and to be filled appropriately with the reaping and the meaning that such a sight should be about.

I know in my own life there have been times when I get a war of my sin, but I have to be honest and say that my response to it really didn't fit my awareness.

[35:21] And I have to pray, God, would you grip my heart by my sin? Would you enable me to see my sin as I ought to see it so that I might surely be moved by it, so that I might surely weep over it?

Help me not just to see that I am prayerless, but Lord, may I grieve over prayerlessness. Help me not just to see that I am lukewarm and cold, but Lord, help me to grieve over lukewarmness and coldness and indifference.

And he would lend that to us, he would enable us to rightly respond to sin as we see it in our lives. And when we do this, when we respond in this way, we are responding to this call to godliness, this humbling of ourselves before the Lord, this drawing more to God in repentance and in contrition.

I trust we see these two connections this morning, this connection of pride and godliness and humility and godliness. Mutually exclusive, we can't be both at the same time.

Pride and worldliness or humility and godliness. And God gives grace that we would pursue humility and pursue godliness. And I pray for all of us.

[37:00] I pray in this moment, I pray over the next few days, and particularly for all of us who find grace. To sing the Lord, to humble ourselves before him, to cry out for holiness, to cry out for godliness, and to respond as I've ever had, is to respond with whatever he convicts us.

As I close this morning, I want to just say a word to our young people, and I want to really encourage you to embrace this time of prayer and fasting to some degree.

Now, we don't expect you to embrace it fully, indeed, none of you are not able to, the way your parents might do so, but I want you to think about how you might be able to engage this time. Doing something different with your time, doing something different, maybe with how you may approach meals. Maybe there's a particular meal during this three-day period that you will skip, and use our time to pray, and come before the Lord, asking him to work in your life.

If you find yourself not being dedicated to the purposes of God, and maybe distracted by friends, or enticed by friends, or certain people, bring that before the Lord this week, and ask that to help you to be singular minded for him, and to be willing to stand for him, you do that all on your own.

[38:37] And you know what, this year could be a defining one in your life, where you could settle that issue, that your heart is going to be given to the Lord alone in service.

And so I pray that God would meet us during these days, and he would do a miserable work in all of us, wherever we find ourselves this morning.

And the one common denominator between all of us is that every single one of us, whoever we are, can draw more to God.

All of us. And so let's do that. The grace that God provides is true and to God this week. So open our hearts, open our ears, and let us hear him speak.

Let's pray. Father we have thanks this morning for your word. I pray that everyone under the sound of your voice this morning, whether in this room or a live stream, we hear the call to join the God.

[40:04] And God, I pray that we do so by the means that you provided and that is by the grace that you give to all of us. God, may we truly cleanse our hearts, may we purify our hearts, may we move and mourn!

know us and that we will rejoice in all that is lovely and beautiful that we have in Christ.

God, you are welcome in this we pray. In this we sang this song welcome and hearts, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's sing the closing song. Let's sing the closing song.