Seek the Lord Sincerely

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0:00] Good morning, church. The scripture reading is taken from James chapter 4, verses 1 through 10.!

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?! Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have.
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 you.
[1:11] But he 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 near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.
Amen. One of the sobering realities of the Christian life is that sometimes our sins are such that they identify us more as belonging to the world than as belonging to God.
And by this I mean that we who belong to Christ sometimes live in ways that identify us as being in the kingdom of darkness rather than in the kingdom of light.
[2:31] And this is a sobering reality because scripture warns us against this again and again. And this passage that was just read in our hearing is one such example.

And this morning as we turn our hearts towards this week of corporate consecration, as we set our minds to seek the Lord this week, I pray that the Lord will speak to us from this passage.
I pray that he would help us to posture our hearts to seek him and to repent. To repent of patterns and ways of living that are contrary to what he has called us to do and to be as his children.
And that's my prayer for us this morning. And I want to take a moment now to pray for us that the Lord will do that. Father, we bow our hearts before you this morning.
And Lord, we do so acknowledging our need for you. Lord, we can all acknowledge that we have not been the people that you have called us to be.
[3:47] Lord, in different ways and in different degrees we have fallen short of the people that you have saved us to be and you have called us to be.

And Father, we ask that you would speak to us from your word. Lord, you know where each one of us is, particularly. All things are naked before you. Nothing is hid from you.
And I pray that we will honestly submit ourselves to your word this morning. And submit ourselves to this time of consecration this week, Lord. And we ask that you would speak to us.
Speak to us now and speak to us throughout this week. We pray and we ask in Jesus' name.
Amen. These words of James are both convicting and encouraging.
But before they can truly encourage us, they need to convict us. And I pray that that is what we all experience this morning. James is challenging the reality of worldliness in the lives of the people of God.
[5:04] And he calls them to repent. And so as we prepare for our week of corporate consecration, I pray that we reflect on these words. And as we reflect on these words, I pray that we'll see that as we draw near to God, our lives will be marked more by godliness.

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Godliness than worldliness. And that's because this passage calls all of us who belong to Christ to renounce worldliness and to pursue godliness by drawing near to the Lord.
And brothers and sisters, if we experience conviction from this passage, from this sermon, that is a good thing. It is an indication that we are drawing near to God.
It's an indication that our heirs are open to the Lord. But this morning, if we can be aware of sin in our lives, in particular patterns of sin, and there is no conviction, brothers and sisters, we should be concerned.
To whatever degree that we need to be convicted, may the Lord convict our hearts. And may we run to him and ask him to do for us what only he can do.
[6:31] In this passage, James calls us to do two particular things. When you summarize these ten verses, he calls us to do two particular things.

And these two particular things are the two points of this morning's sermon. First James calls us to renounce worldliness. Worldliness is one of those words that is defined by whoever is giving the meaning.
People mean different things when they use the word worldliness. Worldliness. I remember the church I grew up in, a Pentecostal denomination.
Worldliness had its own definition in that denomination. Thank God for that denomination. I came to Christ in that denomination. I'm grateful to them. But they defined worldliness by externals.
They defined worldliness by the things that people did or didn't do. It was by the clothes you wore or the hairstyle that you wore or the music you listened to or the movies that you watched.
[7:45] And it's not to say that the things that we do do not indicate some degree of worldliness, but what we see is that worldliness at its core is a hard issue.

We see that that is what James is addressing in this passage. Worldliness at its core is a hard issue. Before it is manifested in anything that we do, worldliness is a matter of our hearts.
In these verses before us, James not only defines worldliness, but he also describes it. He defines worldliness in verse 4 and he gives it from a heart perspective.
He says that worldliness is friendship with the world. It is having affections for the world that rightly belong to God and God alone.
And he calls God's people who are friends with the world adulterous people. And that's because God's people are married to him and any love for the world is a betrayal of their love and their relationship with the Lord.
[9:04] Now, what world is James talking about? Clearly, he's not talking about the natural, physical world. Instead, he's talking about the moral, spiritual world.

And the world that James is addressing is the world of fallen humanity that is in organized rebellion against God in their behavior, in their attitudes, and in their values.
It's the world that God saved us out of. It's the world that he has said to us, come out and be separate. Listen to the words of Jesus.
He puts it in great perspective in terms of what this looks like in his high priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus prayed this prayer just hours before he was arrested and crucified.
This is what it says in verses 14 and 16. He prays to the Father, So Jesus, in his prayer, declares that we are not of the world, just as he himself is not of the world.
[10:37] And he prayed that as we live in the world, that we would not be of the world. That we would be people who it is evident that we don't belong to this world.

We go to our jobs and we work like everyone else. But it is clear that we are not of the world. But it is clear that we are not a part of the world system that is an organized rebellion against God.
We are living our lives in submission to him. In order for us to not be of the world, as believers, we need to see it for what it is.
We need to understand the world for what it is. We need to see that Satan, the evil one, is the God of this world. Now, before defining worldliness in verse 4, James gives us an example of worldliness in verses 1 to 4.
And the example that he gives us, I'm sure that all of us are familiar with it. The example that James gives us is the example of quarreling.
[11:51] Or as we Bahamians say, rowing. And so think for a moment of your last argument. When it was, who it was with.

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Maybe it was with your husband or your wife. Or with your child. Maybe it was a brother or sister or co-worker.
Imagine James speaking to you and asking you, what was the reason that you were quarreling? What was that quarrel all about? And true to form, I believe all of us would try to recount the facts of what happened and what the person did or what the person did not do or is not doing.
Maybe the wife says, my husband doesn't love me as he should. He takes me for granted. And I'm just tired of it. Or the husband says, well, my wife, she just doesn't respect me.
And I put it with her too long and so I'm putting my foot down. Or maybe it's, you say it's your supervisor. Your supervisor doesn't like you and always tries to get you upset and treats you unfairly.
[13:09] And the list goes on. We can recount all kinds of facts. But James would respond to us and say, that's not why you're quarreling. James will tell us, the reason that you're quarreling is something more fundamental than that.

The fundamental reason that James would point out to us as to why we're quarreling is that we have become friends of the world and we have adopted practices of the world.
Look again at how he says this, beginning in verse 1. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this that your passions are at 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 you 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?
[14:22] Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Now, James is addressing believers.

James is addressing the scattered saints to whom his letter was written. And he is using some strong words as he addresses them.
He says that we quarrel and we fight because our passions are at war within us. Because we can't have what we want.
We can't have our own way. When we can't, he says, what we do is we act like the world. We quarrel and we fight.
And what James tells us is that rather than quarreling and fighting, we should pray to God and we should ask him to bring about what we desire. And he points to another problem.
[15:24] He says, sometimes when we pray, we're praying with wrong motives. We're praying to get God to answer us, to feed the sinful passions in our hearts.

And James concludes and he says, all of this is because of worldliness. It is because you're so close to the world, you have adopted the ways of the world. You are acting like the world acts, motivated by its values and its scene in your conduct.
It's very strong words that James is using to bring this contradiction to our attention.
Now, let's be clear that James is not addressing just normal disagreements. Normal disagreements, they are normal. We have disagreements for the basic fact that we're different.
And sometimes we have different perspectives on things. And so disagreements are legitimate. They happen. But James is addressing disagreements that descend into quarreling.
[16:38] Descend into trying to almost bring about the result that we want rather than going as far as we are able to go in a normal conversation and then leaving it and trusting the Lord to act in his way and in his time.

It's not taking the matter into our own hands. Now, in verse 4, James uses this word adulterous. And this is where I think we need to hear two things that James is saying. James is trying to help us to see that, first of all, we belong to the Lord.
And he is saying that whoever wishes to be a friend with the world makes himself an enemy with the Lord.
He says you are aligning with the world. Your affections are like the world. And as a result, you are engaged in spiritual adultery.
[17:52] Now, the encouragement in that is that only a person who is married can commit adultery.

So although James is using this strong language, although James is rebuking his hearers in his day and by extension in our day, when we live a life that's contrary to what God has called us to be,

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James is acknowledging that we belong to the Lord.
And he's basically saying because you belong to Christ, don't live this way. Don't behave this way. This is inconsistent with who you are. You are married to God. And so we have to hear both things that he's saying.
He's calling us away from something. And the reason he's calling us away from it, he's saying, live according to who you are. Live in accordance with this married relationship that you have for the Lord.
Now, James is talking about jealousy in verse 5, and we should not hear that he's talking about human jealousy because that's not what he's addressing.
[19:13] He's addressing divine jealousy. Divine jealousy is not human jealousy. It's not sinful jealousy. It's not rooted in insecurity and in selfishness.

Instead, God's jealousy is motivated by the fact that he desires the best for us. And when we forsake the Lord and we become friends with the world, it provokes his jealousy.
Listen to what the Lord says to Moses and the children of Israel in Exodus 34, verse 14. He said to them, For you shall worship no other God, for the Lord whose name is Jealous is a jealous God.
Of the many names of the Lord, one of his names is jealous. Jealous in a beneficial way.
Jealous in a beneficial way. That's one of his names, Jealous. And we who have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, we belong to the Lord.
[20:26] And when we walk away from our relationship in the affections of our hearts, we are committing spiritual adultery, and it stirs up the jealousy of the Lord.

And that's why James is pointing out in verse 5 that God is jealous over the spirit that he has made to dwell within us.
And so, brothers and sisters, as we consider these plain words of James this morning, where do you see the affections of your heart and the conduct of your life?
Are they contrary to what they ought to be as a Christian? Do you see perhaps some area of your life where you're not governing your passions?
Where it is descending into quarreling because you're seeking to have your own way and not trusting the Lord to bring about his will in his time and in his way?
[21:37] Is your heart being drawn into practices and activities that you should be repelled from as opposed to drawn to?

By being entertained perhaps by music and movies that should grieve you rather than entertain you. And obviously the same can be asked about our engagement on social media.
Are we being entertained by what should instead grieve us? And these are important considerations for us to reflect upon.
Because again, James affirms that God's people can behave in this way. That's why he's addressing them.
But it can also be that there's someone who is under the false assurance that they belong to Christ and they're living this way and they are therefore comfortable living this way.
[22:50] Saying, well, yes, sometimes Christians can be that way. Brothers and sisters, this is not something that we ought to be playing on the edge with. This is something that we ought to take seriously and we ought to be fighting sin.

We ought to be repenting of sin, turning away from sin. Because as we do that, we give evidence to the fact that we belong to the Lord. Repentance is a lifelong process and an activity that we should be engaged in as believers.
It gives evidence to the fact that we belong to Christ. And so we should take very seriously, very soberly, these words that James is addressing.
Being a Christian is more than professing Christ. Being a Christian is more than praying a prayer to, quote unquote, receive Christ.
Being a Christian is possessing Christ. And being possessed by Christ. And the sad reality is that many people who profess Christ, who do not know Christ, they are unregenerate.
[24:09] They have not been born again. They are not saved. And knowing that reality, if we see in our lives attitudes and actions, conduct, behavior, that is contrary to what the plain teaching of Scripture says, we should be concerned, brothers and sisters.

And we should repent. We believe that those who are truly saved are always saved. We believe that.

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But it should not be a smug shield that we stand behind when we engage in patterns of sin in our lives.
And so this morning, if you find yourself in that situation where there are patterns of sin in your life, and you're comfortable with that, I call you to self-evaluation. I call you to consider and hear these words this morning.
And this week of corporate consecration is an opportune time to do that, to do the self-evaluation before the Lord.
[25:24] And to pause and reflect to see where we truly stand with Him. And I'll come to the second thing that James calls us to in this passage, and it's my second and final point.

He calls us to pursue godliness. Renounce worldliness. Pursue godliness. And how do we do that? James tells us in verse 6.
And he tells us that God gives us grace to pursue godliness. Notice again how he says it in verse 6. But he gives more grace.
Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. Notice two times. James points us to the grace of God.
Two times. And he tells us that God gives grace to the humble. He's reminding us that we need God's grace to pursue godliness, and he's pointing us to the one who will give us that grace.
[26:33] Brothers and sisters, it matters not how badly we feel about our sins. We don't have the strength within ourselves to turn and to change. We don't have the strength to pursue godliness on our own.

We need God's grace. And James so graciously in the midst of this rebuke says, but he gives more grace. He resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.
And what James does is James really identifies the root behind the desire to be friends with the world. That root is pride. And that's why God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.
And it's so easy to read past verse 6. The Lord hates pride, and he resists us when there's pride in our hearts. And pride is no light thing to have the God of the universe to be against you, resisting you.
It's better to have the U.S. Army against you, or a coalition of all the big armies against you, than to have the living God to be against you because of pride. But he gives grace.
[27:53] He gives more grace. James goes on, and he tells us in very practical ways how we are to pursue godliness.

In verses 7 to 10, he tells us first and foremost that we are to submit to God. First and foremost, submit to God. That means that instead of exhibiting pride and aligning with the world and behaving like the world, we should pursue godliness by submitting to God.
And we submit to God by submitting to that which he has revealed in his word, that which is plainly before us. If we are actively disobeying and doing what the Lord called us not to do, we are not submitting to God.
And he gives us grace to do it. He gives grace. God gives us grace to submit to him. And that's the only reason we can submit to him. Because he gives us the grace to do it.
And so, for example, in particular situations that we may be faced with even now in our lives, some kind of an active conflict that we may be in with whomever we are related to and is back and forth and trying to get the result we want, submitting to God is just submitting that situation to him as well.
[29:32] Not trying to be God, not trying to play God, but submitting that to him and allowing him to act in accordance with his will, in his way, and in his time.

And again, the only way we can truly do that is by the grace of God. Sometimes we can be so vested in a situation and a tug-of-war with someone over something that it's only by grace we can step away from that and say, God, I trust you.
I trust you with that situation. We submit to God. And second, in verse 7, James tells us that we are to resist the devil.
And the promise is that he will flee to us. And resisting the devil is more about doing that actively in how we live more than saying, Satan, I rebuke you.
Satan, I resist you. It is actively resisting the enemy with the word of God, obeying the word of God.
[30:41] When Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus resisted him with the word of God. And likewise, we must do the same. And this is why hiding God's word in our hearts, memorizing scripture, this puts us in a position to be able to resist the devil.

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Because that's what he understands. He understands God's word. And that's where the power is in the word of God. And then third, in verse 8, he says, we are to draw near to God and the promise is that God will draw near to us.
Now, James could have stopped right here. He could have simply said, draw near to God and he will draw near to you, but he doesn't. James actually, in a very practical way, helps us to see what it could look like to draw near to God.
He says in verse 8, cleanse your hands and purify your hearts. And when he calls us to cleanse our hearts, he is calling us to repent by turning away from things we know are wrong.
He says, cleanse your hands. You know that your hands are dirty from doing particular things that are wrong. Cleanse your hands and cease doing those particular things.
[32:07] And he says, purify your hearts. The cleansing of our hands can be seen by all of us because if you see that I'm going in a certain way, living in a certain way and I cease to do that, well then, you know, okay, I've turned away from that.

James says it's not just in an outward way, he says it's also inwardly. Purify your hearts. And we do that in honesty before the Lord, knowing that no thought is hidden from him.
And we repent of thoughts and motivations and desires that are not pleasing to the Lord. In verse 9, he tells us that we are to be wretched and mourn and weep and we're to let our laughter be turned to mourning and our joy to gloom.
And this is the language of repentance. This is what true repentance is like. It is seeing our sins as we ought to see them and when we see our sins as we ought to see them, brothers and sisters, it's never a happy moment.
Our sins will break us. Our sins will grieve us when we ask the Lord, Lord, help me to see my sin as I ought to see it. And only when he helps us to see it can we really see it. We'll be broken by our sin.
[33:34] Sometimes we laugh about our sins. Sometimes we joke about our sins. And the only time we can laugh about our sins and joke about our sins is when we don't see our sins as the Lord would have us to see them.

And so we need to say, God, help me. Help me to see my sin as I ought to see it. And when we do, we will mourn and we will weep before the Lord.
Our hearts will be broken. We'll remember that the very sins that we joke about, we play about, they sent Christ to the cross. He bore them.
And they are no laughing matter. When we draw near to the Lord, when we seek the Lord, it's never business as usual. When we encounter the Lord, it will be evident that we have encountered the Lord.
It will be evident that we have been with Jesus. It was one of the observations that the people of Jesus' day recognized about his disciples. They said they were unlearned men, but they could tell they'd been with Jesus.
[34:47] And brothers and sisters, may it be said of us that we've encountered Jesus. it is a contradiction of the word of God to claim to have encountered the Lord without change.

And without seeing our sin in a very sober and a serious way. And so I pray that this week we would ask the Lord, God, help me to see my sin as I ought to.
Help me to weep and mourn over my sin. Help me to weep over paralysis. Help me to weep over spiritual coldness. Help me to weep over lukewarmness. Help me to weep over indifference.
She asks the Lord to give us joy over what he has joy about. Amen. Amen. Brothers and sisters, God has given us means by which we can draw near to him.
He's given us his word. He's given us prayer and fasting and seeking the Lord as we'll be doing this week. Let us embrace these means that God has given to us to draw near to him.
[36:15] And I pray as we consider this passage that we're able to see the connections between pride and worldliness and humility and godliness.

When you think about how James concludes this section in verse 10, he concludes it by saying, humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.
When you take this back to where he starts with quarreling and fighting and all the other, he's basically saying, just humble yourself. Put those things down and humble yourself and then God will exalt you.
God will vindicate you in that situation. And so I urge all of us this morning, let us turn from pride and worldliness, let us turn to God in humility and godliness.

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I want to conclude just to give a word to the young people who are with us this morning. There is no expectation that you would engage this week as your parents do.
[37:33] There's no expectation that you will fast, but I pray that you will pray. I pray that you would take more time to pray and be in God's word and to submit your young life before the Lord.

And you know what? You can pray a blank check prayer for God's word. Lord, whatever your will is, may your will be done in my life. God, whatever your future is that you have for me, God, I want that.
And how wonderful it would be if many years later you could point back to this week and say, that was the week I prayed about this and I sought the Lord about my future and I know God led me in this particular way that I pursued.
I encourage you to talk with your parents about what that may look like for you this week. Or maybe you aren't able to, we're not calling you to fast fully, but maybe you'll push away desserts, you'll push away something and use that time to try to really pray and come before the Lord.
Maybe you're a young person and right now you're still on the coattails of your parents' faith. And you've not really settled whether you are going to serve the Lord or not.
[38:53] Maybe you're double-minded. Maybe you're like some with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. I encourage you to use this week to try to settle that. To settle that that you're going to serve the Lord or you're going to do His will.

You're not going to be aligned with the world or aligned with your friends who are going in the way of the world, but you will serve the Lord. And may the Lord meet us with much grace this week.
I think it goes without saying that we will experience spiritual warfare this week. The enemy of our soul will fight us. He will bring contention between husbands and wives.
He will bring contention between children and parents. He will bring contention on our jobs. He will cause all manner of things that the Lord sovereignly permits him to do to fight us this week.
And so we need God's grace. And I pray that the Lord will help us not to be ignorant of His devices so that we may truly draw near to the Lord. And as we do, He will meet us and He will draw near to us.
[40:13] Let's pray. Father, we pray in this moment and ask that You would do for us what only You can do.

Lord, would You apply to our hearts the words of this text and the burden of this sermon.
Would You help us to seek You this week? Would You help us to draw near to You? Would You help us to renounce worldliness and pursue godliness? Be glorified in our lives personally and our families and in this church family this week, Lord.
Where would You meet us? Would You shower us with Your grace this week and do for us what only You can do.
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand for closing song. Amen. Amen.

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