

Draw Near to God

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[0 : 00] And please turn your Bible to James chapter 4.

! Our attention this morning will be directed to verses 1 through 10.! No doubt some of you have noticed that the title and text of the sermon this morning are different from what is printed in the bulletin.

And although that is the case, the pastoral burden of the sermon is the same. It's the same as I intended to preach from 1 John 2, 15 through 17.

And my burden is this, that the Lord would use the sermon to help us to prepare our hearts for our week of corporate consecration through prayer and fasting. One of the sobering realities of the Christian life is that God's people are saints and sinners at the same time.

In other words, we are saints who sin. And so those of us who have put our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we've received forgiveness for our sins.

[1 : 13] We belong to God. He has saved us. He has set us aside as saints. But we still sin. Now if we truly belong to Christ, we do not sin in the same way that we sinned before we came to Christ.

But the reality is that we still sin. And sometimes our sins are such that they identify us more as being the people of the world than being the people of God.

And not only do we see this contradicting reality in life, we also see it in Scripture. And James 4, verses 1 through 10, is one of those places in Scripture where we see this contradicting reality.

And this morning as we prepare for our week of corporate consecration starting tonight, my prayer is that these words from the book of James will guide and prepare our hearts as we come before the Lord this week.

So please follow along as I read. James 4, verses 1 through 10. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

[2 : 33] Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and you 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?

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

[3 : 45] 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. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word this morning.

Lord, your word is our life. Father, we ask that you would use your word to our hearing for the good of our lives in this church, in our families, and individually.

Father, in particular, we ask that you would cause us to hear your word as we prepare for this week of prayer and fasting. God, would you glorify your own name in the preaching of your word, and would you build up this church?

[5 : 09] Build up this church, Lord, that we may be a bright light in this community. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. These words that we have just read from the book of James are both

convicting and encouraging.

Before they will truly encourage us, they need to truly convict us. James is challenging the reality of worldliness in the lives of the people of God, and he calls for repentance.

And as we prepare for this week of corporate consecration, I believe that these words are fitting for us to contemplate.

These words offer us hope, and they offer us encouragement. And here's the hope and encouragement that I pray that we will all leave with this morning and hold on to throughout the remainder of this week and indeed beyond.

As we draw near to God, our lives will be marked more by godliness than by worldliness.

[6 : 23] That's what I pray would be our portion and our hope this morning that as we draw near to God, our lives will be marked more by godliness than by worldliness.

And so the point for all of us this morning is to draw near to God. And as we experience, I pray, conviction from God's word this morning as we encounter the Lord this week during our corporate time together in consecration, let us remember that as we draw near to God, he will draw near to us.

And so this morning, I have two simple points and I'll build them around two single words. And the first word is worldliness. Worldliness is a word that is defined in different ways depending on who's defining it.

worldliness. I grew up in a very legalistic Pentecostal denomination, which I'm grateful because in that denomination I came to faith in Christ as a 12-year-old boy.

But the denomination that I was in misunderstood worldliness. And worldliness was, had a whole lot to do with the things you wore and what you didn't wear.

[7 : 52] The styles that you were attracted to and were not attracted to. And so back in the 70s, when bell-bottoms and broad-belts were in, they were in styles so the church that we were part of said they were worldly so we couldn't wear bell-bottoms and we couldn't wear broad-belts.

And of course, when bell-bottoms and broad-belts went out, before they went out, we wore skinny pants, skinny, what do you call them? Tight, I forget what you call them, but slim pants and skinny belts.

And so when bell-bottoms and broad-belts were in, we had to wear skinny pants and skinny belts. And then when bell-bottoms and broad-belts went out of style, they were no longer worldly so we could now wear them.

So we were always kind of like, me and my brother BJ in particular, we were always out of step with the style because the church we were in would say you're worldly if you're wearing those things that the rest of the world wears.

And the same was true with haircuts. At that time, afro was in style. Everybody had big afros except us. We would have our skin to the skin. And because having afros was worldly.

[9 : 04] And then when afros went out, of course, we were the ones with afros and always on the wrong side of the style because it was worldly to be on the side where everybody else was.

I remember the first time I went to the movie theater. It was to watch A Midsummer Night's Dream and I had to get permission to be able to go and I'll never forget, I walked out of the theater and I felt like I'd committed the greatest sin.

I felt so unclean coming out of, you know, it was dark on the inside and then you walk out into all the light. We never went to the movie theater because they said that the theater was sin. Now, it was funny because when the movies were old and they were no longer played in the theater, we could watch them at home.

So I saw and learned that it wasn't the movie, it was the place. Going to the theater was just considered a sin. In the passage before us, though, James not only defines worldliness for us, he describes it.

In verse 4, he defines worldliness as friendship with the world. It's having affections for the world. And the world that James has in view is not the natural world, the physical world.

[10 : 28] Instead, the world 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.

That's the world that James has in view. The moral, spiritual world of fallen humanity organized in rebellion against God in attitudes and behavior and in values.

James warns us not to have friendship with that world. But before defining worldliness in verse 4, what James does for us is he gives us an example of worldliness in verses 1 through 4.

The example he gives us is quarreling, or as we would say as Bahamians, rowing. That's not rowing, that's rowing. So think about your last argument.

Maybe it was with your husband or your wife or your child or maybe a co-worker. maybe it was a sibling. Imagine if James was speaking to you and he would have said to you, what was the quarrel about?

[11 : 47] Well, we might say, well, it was my wife. She always lets the children have their own way. She doesn't discipline them. Or the wife might say, oh, it's my husband.

He doesn't help me around the house. He lets me do all the cleaning by myself. We both work and he doesn't even pick up his own things and he creates more work for me. Or you might say, oh, it's people, they keep moving my things.

They move my things and don't put it where they got it from. That's one of the things I would say.

And James would say to us, I hear you, but that's not the reason you quarreled.

The reason you quarreled is because your passions are at war within you and because you can't have things your way, you murder, you fight, and you quarrel.

And now we can't be sure that James was referring to actual, literal murder when he was speaking. He may have been speaking figuratively, but we know that sometimes people in their quarrels resort to murder.

[13 : 02] And sadly, even some Christians in their anger have taken the lives of others. James tells us that our quarrels are the result of angry passions because we cannot have what we desire.

And here what James does is he helps us to see our quarrels not just on the human level. In verses 2 and 3, if you would look at them, James helps us to see that our quarrels are also on a divine level.

At the end of verse 2, he says, you have not because you do not ask. And clearly by ask, he's referring to prayer. James is telling us that some of the things we desire we don't have because we have not brought them to the Lord in prayer.

We have not asked him and so we don't have them. Instead of asking God in prayer about situations, we quarrel with the people connected to them rather than praying to God.

So how about us, for example, praying to God about our wife or about our husband or about our child or about our co-worker instead of quarreling with them.

[14 : 22] And to be clear, James is not addressing disagreements because we have disagreements for all kinds of different reasons. They're part of life. One of the reasons that we disagree is that people are just different and they have different perspectives on the same things.

Now such disagreements may lead to quarreling if we don't leave them with the Lord and trust him to have his way rather than enforcing our own way.

But James is not saying that we should not have disagreements because disagreements would be a natural part of life. Notice in verse 3 that James tells us that some of the things we don't have are because when we pray we have lustful motives.

And God says no and God tells us we're not going to get what we desire and so we get upset.

James is telling us that sometimes God says no to our requests because if he grants them he will feed our passions.

our wrong passions. And so we get angry and we quarrel with people when the person we should be engaging is God himself. Now when we come to verse 4 it really is quite a surprise what we see James saying.

[15 : 56] In verse 4 we read 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.

Now where did that come from? How does James move from talking about quarreling to calling people who are quarreling adulterous people?

How does he move from one to the other? I think at first glance when we consider these words of James they seem stinging and they seem almost disconnected as if James is ranting.

But on close inspection we see that he is not ranting and actually what James says rightly received is encouraging. Here is what James is saying James is saying that quarreling conduct this quarreling conduct that he has just described is the conduct of the world and when God's people

behave like that they have aligned themselves with the world and he calls it spiritual adultery. Verse 4 James calls it friendship with the world and he says whoever makes himself a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. And this brothers and sisters is why worldliness is so deceptive and it is so dangerous.

[17 : 25] And again what James has in view here is the rebellion of the world against God and what he tells us in verse 5 is that God yearns jealously over the spirit that he is made to dwell in us.

So when the people of God who he is redeemed out of the world align themselves with the world they make themselves God's enemy God yearns over his people in whom he has put his spirit. Now what should be clear to us is that the reason James is so strongly rebuking this kind of conduct and rebuking Christians who behave this way is that such conduct shows outwardly that we belong to the world and not to God even though in fact we do belong to God and this is why this is so important it's important because earlier in this letter James in chapter 2 James is addressing the issue of faith and works and he makes the point that people who say they believe in God need to have evidence that matches the faith they claim to have in God in chapter 3 James takes a good bit of time to talk about the tongue and he says that we can't claim to belong to God and have both blessing and cursing coming out of our mouths listen how he says it in James 3 verses 10 through 12 from the same mouth come blessing and cursing my brothers these things ought not be so as a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and salt water can a fig tree my brothers be our olives or a grapevine produce figs neither can a salt pond yield fresh water notice two times he's addressing his hearers as my brothers and then he goes on in the latter part of chapter 3 verses 13 through 18 he talks about jealousy and selfish ambition and then he comes to this passage that we are considering this morning and the one word for all of this contrary conduct that James highlights among the people of God is worldliness and so this morning I would encourage us to think about these very plain and direct words of James and think about our own conduct and think about where in our lives there's contrary conduct to the life that we all know we should be living as those who belong to God is it in the area of quarreling and not governing our passions and not praying about things that we should be praying about is that the contrary area and I think it's important for us to really think about because although James affirms that the people of God can sometimes live like the world there's a real possibility that in some cases some who are conducting themselves that way do not belong to Christ at all they may profess Christ but they do not possess Christ they are unregenerate and therefore we should not take comfort from the fact that a person could act in some ways like the world and still be a Christian it should sober us because the danger is that we may not be a Christian at all we may not be regenerate at all and so this calls us self evaluation and that's you this morning and you profess to know Christ as Savior and Lord but your life is aligned to this world its behavior its attitude its values then we need to pause we evaluate where we truly stand do you belong to

[21 : 57] Christ or do you belong to this world and so the call is that we would turn from worldliness and we would pursue godliness and this brings you to my second and final point which again is a single word and that word is godliness how do we turn from worldliness to godliness James tells us in verse 6 that God gives us grace to do it he gives us grace to do it the call that is upon us this morning to draw near to god is not something we can do in our own strength by deciding we will do better deciding we will be better no it is something that god has to enable us to do he needs to give us grace to be able to do it and so what James says in verse 6 is but he gives more grace therefore it says god opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble and what

James tells us in verse 7 is that first and foremost we are to submit to god god gives us the grace to submit to him and that means that instead of exhibiting pride instead of aligning ourselves with the world we are to pursue godliness and we are to pursue submission to god this means that in situations where quarreling is the result or can be the result instead of quarreling we need to submit to god we need to submit ourselves to god submit our case to god and trust god to work and to submit to god means to submit to his will and to his way and to live based on his terms and again the only way that we can do that is we need the grace of god provides the grace that james refers to in verse six verse seven james tells us that we are to resist the devil and the promise is he will flee from us if we resist him and here what is in view is that it is the devil who is tempting us in the same way that he tempted jesus beyond behind our quarrels and our fights it is the devil who is the real enemy he is the one who is behind the person of persons that we may be engaging in the moment he is the one who we need to resist and when jesus was tempted by the devil jesus responded with

the word of god and this is why hiding god's word in our heart is so important because it enables us to have god's word in our hearts and on our lips in times of temptation in particular in verse eight we're told to draw near to god and the promise is he will draw near to us notice that we resist the devil he flees from us we draw near to god he draws near to us and james shows us the way we are to draw near to god we draw near to god in repentance we return from sin we cleanse our hands we purify our hearts he tells us that we should be wretched and we should mourn and we should weep and that our laughter should be turned into mourning and our joy to gloom and this is the language of repentance brothers and sisters it's a call to turn away from sin it's a call to turn away from sitting on the fence and being double minded in our ways trying to serve the lord on the one hand and then the world on the other hand with a divided heart and a double mind and here let us remember that god has means by which we do this he's not telling us you just go near draw near to god in a vacuum and each one of you can choose how you want to do that that's not what he's saying at all god has means by which we do this and some of those means are reading his word and hearing his word preach as we are doing this morning it's through prayer it's through fasting which we will seek to do in a concentrated way this week let us embrace these means as we seek to draw near to god and these are gracious means that god has given to us and god gives us grace in the midst of them as we try to seek him so let us not hear these words to draw near to god in isolation away from the grace

and the means that god gives us to be able to do them because brothers and sisters if all god did was to tell us to do that and fold his arms we would drift from god before we would draw near to god but god gives us the grace to do what he calls us to do to draw near to him that is embrace the means and that is embrace the grace that he provides for us to do that James is calling us to be honest and to see ourselves in our true condition with the help of the holy spirit where we may be compromising and any glimpse of that will bring us to true weeping and true mourning over our sins it's only as we see our sins the way god would have us to see them that they will bring true contrition and true mourning and so we need to ask the lord god would you help me to weep over prayerlessness help me to see prayerlessness for what it is help me to see spiritual coldness for what it is help me to see indifference and lukewarmness for what they are only god can help us to weep over what we should weep over and to receive joy what we should receive joy over and what is all of this this is godliness this is what we are called to pursue by humbling ourselves before the lord drawing near to him in repentance and in contrition and I trust we see the connections that James is raising pride and worldliness humility and godliness pride and worldliness humility and godliness and so church this morning I

I call you as I call myself by God's grace let us turn from pride and worldliness let us pursue humility and godliness as we consecrate ourselves in prayer and fasting this week and God will meet us it's been faithful to meet us over 20 odd years as we have embraced this practice of carving out a week in the first month to come before him as a church personally he will meet us with much grace as we draw near to him let's pray up up