

The Root of Our Problem

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 July 2020

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Good morning. We are going to continue our sermon series in the book of James this morning. So if you're at home or if you have a phone, you can turn to James 4.

If you brought your Bible, you can turn to James 4. We'll be looking at James 4, 1 through 10. And the passage will also be up on the screen for those of us who are here in person.

James 4 is our passage this morning. Let's go ahead and read God's Word together. James 4, starting in verse 1.

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 Scriptures say he yearns jealously over the Spirit that he is made to dwell in us?

[1 : 30] But he gives more grace. And 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. This is God's Word. Please pray with me. Lord, as we come to this Word this morning, we are struck by its tone of admonition, of exhortation, of confrontation.

God, I pray this morning that you would prepare our hearts to receive your Word. God, I pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work in our hearts. Lord, that we would sit humbly under your Word.

[2 : 44] We would receive it and that you would show us, Lord, how it reveals our sin and our need for your grace. God, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart would be acceptable in your sight.

Oh, Lord, my rock and my redeemer. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. What is this passage about?

Well, James tells us in the very first sentence. He says, What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? And I was reflecting on the fact that, golly, we don't have to look very far, particularly in our pandemic world today, to think about quarrels and fights going on.

We hear stories of security guards assaulted for requiring someone to wear a mask as they enter into a business. I read a news report of a hotel clerk up in Mystic who was assaulted by two guests because their room did not have hot water.

Certainly, our time at home has given us many, many opportunities for fights and quarrels with those that we live with. And when we read the news, as we open our browsers, or some of us are old-fashioned enough to actually read a paper, we see that our social and political world is full of conflict, quarrels, and fights.

[4 : 14] And while we need to recognize that, as Pastor Nick mentioned last week, there are fights worth fighting, and there are things worth addressing, many, many times, we see that there is another root of that.

And so James asks, What causes these things? Why do we as human beings default towards quarreling and fighting with one another? And it doesn't seem like James is addressing a particular incident in the church, because there's not a lot of content to it.

He's saying this is a pattern. This is something that is characterizing not only the world at large as humanity, but even the church itself. And think about what we've already seen him talk about.

How discrimination against maybe rich or poor, people who have greater prominence and less prominence, and how there have been divisions caused in the church that he's already begun to address.

And James comes like an expert doctor, a soul surgeon. He examines the symptoms. He probes deeper to try to find underlying causes, gives a diagnosis, and then turns the corner and says, Here's the prescription.

[5 : 34] This is how we do it. And so this is what we're going to do this morning, is see how James takes us through this process of understanding his diagnosis, what causes these problems.

And then he will give us a prognosis. How do we move forward from here? So first, what is the diagnosis? And as James looks here, there is layers. In verses 1 through 4, there are layers of things that he is addressing.

But fundamentally, he's saying this. We are self-centered and God-ignoring in our fundamental orientation and attitude of life.

We approach our everyday life and our everyday interactions thinking more about ourselves than anyone else. And in the meantime, we ignore God in the process.

Why do I say this? Well, here's Dr. James trying to get under the skin a little bit. Verses 1 and 2 tells us, why do we have fights and quarrels? Because we want something and we can't get it.

[6 : 41] Right? And anyone who's had a two-year-old knows what that looks like. But maybe there are other times when we see that more clearly. When the girl we were hoping to ask out on a date gets asked out by someone else first.

Or maybe when you find yourself at work starting to run down a colleague to your other co-workers because they're getting all the praise and all the attention and you're feeling jealous.

Maybe some of you are struggling financially or materially and you are finding yourself jealous of those who have more than you do. Or maybe it's just you really want to be right in this conversation. Whatever it is, you just want to be right. And you just can't let go of attacking and questioning and proving and defending and explaining and justifying again.

All of these things are examples, I think, of how our hearts want things and when we can't get them, the ugliness emerges and we find ourselves in conflict with others.

[8 : 01] Now look, it's not always actual fistfights and wars. James uses very strong militaristic language. Most of us don't experience that. Sometimes we do, right?

And sometimes we see that on a more societal level that it comes to actual violence and real wars. But here mostly he's talking about interpersonally and the war that our words wage with one another and our actions.

So he says, well, here are some of the symptoms. This is what we see. You don't have and you want it and so you try to take it for yourselves. And this is where he gets to the, you don't have because you don't ask.

Instead of thinking that someone might give you something good, you think, I have to go get it myself and it's up to me. And do you see the self-orientation in that? And then he says, and for those of you who are Christians and you're asking God for things, do you not understand He is not answering prayers partly because you are asking purely for selfish motives.

You are not asking for God's glory. You are not asking for the good of others. You are simply asking, this is what I want. God, give it to me now. And so God is not answering, even if you're asking because this fundamental self-orientation is so deep.

[9 : 27] He's used this word passions, these passions that drive us. And this word in the New Testament is almost always used for evil desires, for selfish desires.

What we saw in the end of chapter 3, jealousy and selfish ambition are two of the driving passions. But we could think of other passions, things that we long for, things that we lust for, selfishly for our own gain and our own good.

They are self-oriented and self-procured. And is this not, of course, brothers and sisters, the root of sin that we know going all the way back to the Garden of Eden?

Is this not what Adam and Eve were tempted by and fell into? God had provided them a place where everything was provided for them. And yet, when the enemy came in and laid a seed of doubt, says, is God really good?

Is He really going to give you everything that is good? Is He withholding from you? Maybe you need to go and take this yourself. Maybe you have to do it apart from God. And that's what Adam and

Eve did when they rebelled against Him, broke His commandment, took the fruit, and in doing so, separated themselves out and said, rather than being under God and receiving from Him, I want to be like God and provide for myself and be the center.

[10 : 58] One commentator, Alec Motier, says this, the one thing our hearts are solidly loyal to is our own personal satisfaction.

And then, James takes it one more level in verse 4. He says, you adulterous people, you who have allowed your passions to run away from the God of the universe who wants to come and provide for you, you have run away from Him, your faithful spouse, to try to find your selfish satisfaction in others around you.

And this is where he turns to this concept of friendship with the world. If you want, and the world, you must understand that in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, when the word world is used, most of the time, and it's certainly in this case, world is used as a system, a world system, a world view, a way that we work, a world that works in rebellion against God.

That's how it's used often in the New Testament. And it makes a verse like John 3, 16, God so loved the world that He sent His only Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

God isn't just loving His creation that somehow kind of lost its way. He's loving His creation has rejected Him, refused Him, denied Him, expelled Him from their worldview.

[12 : 42] And James says, the quarrels that you have, the selfish desires that you pursue, the passions that you allow to control you are rooted in this fundamental rejection of God.

God. And we cannot be friends with a world that rejects God and be a friend of God as well. They are fundamentally incompatible. And so, He says, if you want to be friends with the world, then you are at odds with God.

You cannot be a friend of the world and not be an enemy of God because to love the world is to love those for whom God is the enemy and to love the thought patterns and the processes.

Verse 5 reinforces this incompatibility of God with self-orientation. Now, if you have a couple of different Bible verses, you will start to see very quickly, this is one of the trickiest Bible verses to translate.

[13 : 54] The translations are all over the place. The ESV, as we read earlier, has the idea that God is being jealous for the spirit of humanity that He has placed in each one of us.

That He wants us to be wholeheartedly faithful towards Him, picking up on the idea of adultery. That's true. All right? But if you read the New King James, what you will see is that what James is saying is you can't be a friend of God and the world because don't you see that you have this spirit of envy in you, this spirit of jealousy that is contrary to God and so it's talking about the nature of jealousy as being evil, not good, and the source of that jealousy being us, not God.

those are two pretty different ideas. They're both true, broader, biblically, so we're not way out on a limb here. But I have been convinced thinking through who's the subject?

Well, I think it's that God is the subject of the jealousy and yet God is a subject of the spirit. This is one of the questions is whether the spirit is the human spirit or the Holy Spirit.

And I think it is the Holy Spirit at work here, but the jealousy is evil. And so he proposes this kind of a translation. Does not Scripture say, does the spirit that he made in us dwell or yearn with sinful jealousy?

[15 : 31] Do you see what he's saying there in that translation? He's saying, how can you have the Holy Spirit of God in you and claim to have this jealous spirit that is of the world?

They are incompatible. And I think that's the clearest understanding. He's continuing this incompatibility theme of there are two ways to live and one of them is causing these fights and quarrels and it's rooted in this fundamental rejection of God.

So this is the upshot of these verses.

We have a sinful self-orientation that excludes God, that depends on ourselves, seeks to get its own. We are driven by passion for selfish desires and we use and abuse others in order to get it. And ultimately, we use our words and our actions for ourself and not for God. Now how do we do, how do we diagnose whether this might be true for us in a particular instance or a particular part of our lives?

[16 : 42] Here are some diagnostic tools for us to ask ourselves how much of this is true of me? And I will say this, friends, if we're thinking that's not true at all, just ask.

God loves to show us where we need to grow. Just ask Him because I believe that this is an ongoing battle of sanctification for Christians till glory comes.

So here are the questions. One, look at our relationships. Is there fighting and quarreling in your relationships? At work, at home, in your marriage, if you're a child between you and your siblings, with your extended family, with your brothers and sisters at church, is there fighting and quarreling? And again, there are times when conflict is a positive thing towards peacemaking. So I want to make sure that I'm not saying that all conflict is always a bad thing. There are times to address things that are wrong.

There are times and there is a way to do that that is not driven by the selfishness and self-orientation that James is talking about here. But most of the time we need, well, let me say it this way, all of the time we need to be asking ourselves, is that the spirit that is driving us in any particular conflict?

[18:10] We must ask God to help us search our hearts. And honestly, friends, this is where asking others who are not a part of the conflict to give you honest feedback and to help you see your own heart, it's also an important tool for us to know.

Look at your relationships. See whether these things are true or not. But not only in our relationships, look at our other investments to see how much our self-orientation controls our lives. Where do we use our money? Where do we use our time? Where do we use our social capital? And by that, I mean our friendships, our reputation, our network.

Do we jealously guard those for our own selfish promotion? Or do we use these things for the good of others and for the glory of God?

Can you see the centrality of God in your life by the way that you use your resources? Jesus said, where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.

[19:30] And we need to remember, He didn't say the, I think it's the obverse. I looked this up. Obverse or converse? Anyway, linguists, you can clear that up later. He didn't say, where your treasure is, no, where your heart is, there will be your treasure.

Because that's what we all want to say. Well, I want to be a good person. I want to help people. What He says is, here's a diagnostic tool. Look at where your treasures actually go. That's what your heart actually loves.

And finally, we need to ask ourselves this question. Are we harboring and justifying sin in our lives? Fundamentally, the world is saying, I don't want God. I want to do it my own way. And there are all sorts of ways in which that could play it out that are clearly outside of God's commands and God's gracious and kind rule in our lives.

And this passage asks us, do you love sin more than God? If so, you are in friendship with the world and at odds with the God of the universe.

[20:46] So relationships, investments, and simply asking the question, am I harboring and justifying sin? James comes at us hard in this passage.

He does not pull his punches. He is not looking to make us feel better about ourselves. He is asking us to do a rigorous self-examination and understand the root of the problem.

But like a good doctor, he not only has a good diagnosis, but he's able to bring to us a prescription, a way forward, something for us to look forward to.

The prognosis that James gives us is in, starts in verse 6. You can look there with me if you want. But he gives more grace. Friends, taking hold of God's grace in humility and repentance is God's remedy to free us from the brokenness of the life of quarreling and fighting, and more broadly in James, the brokenness of being double-minded and unstable.

It is God's grace that brings us to wholeness in Christ. He gives us more grace, and of course, grace is defined by undeserved favor.

[22:05] It is what God brings to us, not because we have tried hard enough or looked good enough or gone to church enough or ticked off the boxes of faithful Christian discipleship in just the right way so that God has said, oh, now I can give you grace.

We don't ever deserve grace. And God not only gives it to us, but he gives us more.

God's grace is never insufficient for us. It is the opposite of the grasping passions that we've seen in verses 1 through 5 where it's, I want, I want, I gotta go get it.

Instead, it's sitting back and saying, God, I can't do anything to deserve this, and I can't even get what I want on my own. Would you give to me what I can't get?

Will you provide for me when I humble myself before you? And this is the picture, of course, that we see in the very core message of Christianity, isn't it?

[23 : 10] This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ. While we were still dead in our sins and trespasses, while we were still enemies of God, Christ died for us.

Christ came, and on the basis of his life and death and resurrection, God now holds out for us a calling to forsake our sinful independence and come to him in humble faith.

And to take hold of Christ by faith gives us wonderful, gracious gifts. We receive undeserved forgiveness of sin so that we no longer bear guilt or fear the judgment of God on our sin.

God's grace also imparts to us a new heart so that our passions are no longer enslaved to sin but are now able, awakened, to be able to love and pursue God's kingdom.

God's grace gives us the undeserved indwelling of the His Holy Spirit so that not only are we awakened to God's kingdom but we are empowered to pursue Him.

[24 : 31] We are actually able to go after what God calls us to not because we have it inside ourselves but because God has given it to us in the Holy Spirit.

And so we see James at the end of verse 6 quoting from Proverbs 3, 34 that He opposes the proud those who would seek to be ruled by their passions and be friends with the world and pursue life apart from God.

He opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble. And this of course is God's means. God provides for us the ability to take hold of His grace to appropriate it, to receive it.

How? By walking a path of humility. By humbling ourselves before God. What does this look like? Well, fundamentally we need to say it is not what we sometimes think.

It is not thinking I'm a worm, I'm a worm, I'm a worm. Right? It is not simply being sorry, I know, I've blown it. Again, it is not just acknowledging I know what I did was wrong and it's hurt people.

[25 : 49] It's not thinking that if we're sorry enough, suddenly God's going to fix everything. But it is an active path of humbling ourselves or even humiliating ourselves before God.

What does that mean? It means positioning ourselves rightly before God. It means when we look at God and we look at His grandeur and His greatness and His perfection and all the good things that He is, we realize we are not those things.

We are but a creature and a fallen broken one at that. And in humility then we come to God and we say, God, You are great and I need everything that You have and I have nothing to bring.

James breaks it down in three steps for us in these passages. First, in verse 7, he says, submit.

Submit to God. Technically, it means to put in order under something, some controlling thing.

To submit to God is to say, not my will, not my understanding, not my way, but Your will be done. And submission biblically does mean obedience.

[27 : 03] It means listening to what God says and doing it. But really to get the fullness of it, it might be better to be thought of in this context as allegiance.

God, I am enlisting under Your flag. I am joining Your army. I am on Your team. And You are the captain. You are the coach. You are the general.

You are the one who are leading. And I will follow you to death. My life is now yours to do what you want with it. It is glad submission to God's rule in our lives.

And of course it says in the second part of verse 7 it says and this means resisting the enemy.

We've already seen the enemy mentioned a couple of times in James how the wisdom from above is demonic a part of a world system and a spiritual system that's in rebellion against God.

But when we in humility enlist in God's army we are called then to fight the battle against and bullies and lies and frightens us into self-centered living because this is what the enemy does.

[28 : 19] He pulls out all the stops to get us to stop trusting God and to just think about ourselves.

It means stopping our ears when we hear the whispers did God really say so first of all humility the path of humility is one of submission but secondly it's also in verse 8 it's drawing near it is not grasping for ourselves but it is running to God to receive from him and he says how do we do this

we'll look at the second half of verse 8 he says first we have to not first but drawing near to God means we have to put off sin and we need to cleanse our hands that's the external and purify our hearts that's the internal work we need to hate sin and run to God as we do this and friends we

know that we can't do this ourselves you know the great picture in the voyage of the dawn treader when

Eustace Clarence scrub the most distasteful human being in all of Narnia's books is transformed into a dragon by magic so that Aslan the lion can come and free him from his selfish orientation but because he's been magically transformed into a dragon he needs to be freed from his dragon skin for him to be renewed and it's a painful process C.S.

Lewis depicts that the lion's claws have to dig deep to scrape off the dragon skin and it hurts and it makes him feel very vulnerable and he's frightened by the process of being unclothed by Aslan the Jesus figure in the story the savior figure Friends this is what drawing near to God means it means us being willing for him to lay bare the depth of our sin and bringing them before the cross to find both forgiveness purification and transformation so that those sins become no longer controlling passions and no longer patterns of behavior in our lives and friends when we do that we must recognize that God has given us means to do this again Motier says this the first element in the conflict is this central battle to live near to

God we have to fight for the battle of regularity and discipline of Bible reading of prayer of public and private worship of feasting at the Lord's table of devoting ourselves to Christian fellowship cultivating every appointed avenue whereby we may draw near to him fellowship with God and its consequent blessing of his fellowship with us does not just happen we cannot drift into it any more than we drift into holiness to pursue these things is our first obedience he says so the path of humility is submission it's drawing near and finally it's mourning look at verse nine James again he does not pull his punches here we must hate sin and mourn its presence in our lives James helps us to remember that sin is so ugly it is so offensive to a holy

God it is so contrary to the beauty and the glory of his kingdom and his righteousness it is what breaks God's heart more than anything else and it stains our lives like sewage thrown onto a bridal gown it destroys beauty the way a buzz saw would in a flower garden our petty arguments and quarrels stain as much as murder and violence James says there is to be no careless laughter about our sin no casual joy while we excuse our little pleasures apart from God but it is instead to recognize that these are the very things that Christ died to save us from and for us to treat them lightly makes us friends of the world and enemies of

[33 : 16] God brings us to verse 10 in the end he says humble yourself then before the Lord and he will exalt you friends God calls us to this unwavering and whole hearted allegiance to him in humility and we know we know that we can't do this we know that our heart will continually turn off the path our heart will continually say no I'd rather be in control thank you very much no I want it my way thank you very much God I want things to happen the way I think it should happen God and I'm going to do whatever it takes for that to happen and gracious and loving Savior Philippians 2 the passage that Daniel read early reminds us in there the apostle

Paul exhorted us to very similar types of living humbly in the first four verses and he says remember Christ who didn't even count equality with God something to be grasped that is he didn't hold on to his privilege as a second person of the Trinity but instead he emptied himself and he came to earth and he took on the form of a created being when he took on the form of humanity he entered into this fallen world with us and he suffered with us and he submitted himself to God's will even to the point of dying on the cross for people who hated him and had rejected him and friends if Christ would do that for us to rescue us from our sin will you trust him will you put yourself in a place of humility before him and say

I will follow in your train you are my captain and I will go along the path of the cross I will humble myself I will submit I will draw near I will mourn my sin and run from it and I will run to you I will run to you so that I may find the very things that I'm longing for for friends this is the foolishness of sin it's the things we fight over and quarrel over and grasp at and think we want to get the exaltation of God is far better than anything we will ever create for ourselves in our lives may we follow James command today to humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God that he may in due time exalt us let's pray together Lord we thank you for this word

Lord I pray for your Holy Spirit that even though it's a beautiful sunny day and it would be easy to walk away from this word and forget it Lord I pray that by your spirit you would help us to meditate on these words and remember them Lord I pray that you would use them Lord to root out sin in our lives Lord that you would use it to transform our hearts that you would develop in us a humility that's like the humility of Christ that you would do this Lord for us Lord so that we might be to your glory we pray this in Jesus name Amen Amen