

James: Worldliness in the Church

James 4:1-5

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If you have your Bibles I would invite you to turn with me to James chapter 4. We've been working through this great book for a number of weeks now. We've seen how James deals with the always relevant subject of the Christian's response to trials in James chapter 1. We also seen how he defines true religion at the end of James chapter 1 from verses 19 — 27, and especially in that 3 point summary in James 1:26 and 27, where he reminds us of some of the essential evidences of true religion, how we show our love tangibly to Christians in need, and how we keep ourselves unstained from the world and worldliness around us. He begins to work out those three things in the rest of the book in James chapter 2, as he talks about the believer in fellowship with other believers and the sin of partiality. He talks about true faith working itself out in loving obedience and care for the brethren in James chapter 3, as he focuses especially on the tongue, and how we use our tongues and our tongues as an evidence of either true or false Christianity.

I especially would ask you to look at James 3 verse 13 to the end of the chapter, because it is that passage which forms the immediate context of the passage we are going to study today. The last time we were together we said that by the time that James gets to 3:13, he's already beginning to transition into his next discussion. He's talked about the tongue. He's talked about our tangible care for believers in need. Now he starts to talk about worldliness. Already in James 3:13-18 that subject is on his mind. It's in full force on his mind in James chapter 4. But these verses provide a transition into that particular passage. And in verses 13-18 he teaches about true wisdom, and specifically, the difference between true and false wisdom. And his words are very, very similar to words we might have heard, say from Job or from Proverbs or from elsewhere in the wisdom teaching of the Old Testament. Bear that in mind then as we look at James 4 verses 1-5, which gives us a searching diagnosis of worldliness and its source. Hear God's Word:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious 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 with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

In James 3 verses 13 -18 James made two major points. First, he asserted that the good life, the truly good life, not the good life that people offer to you out there, but the good life that God intends, this good life is the product of true or heavenly wisdom. It's heavenly wisdom, it's true wisdom that produces the good life. And secondly, he asserted that for heavenly wisdom to grow in us as believers it needs the environment of a fellowship which is intent upon true peace. So in those statements James is teaching us, on the one hand, that if we are going to know true blessedness, true happiness, experience the true satisfaction and fullness of life which God has intended for us, then we need to have true wisdom, heavenly wisdom. And on the other hand he is telling us that you really can't grow as an individual in heavenly wisdom unless you are planted in the kind of soil that heavenly wisdom grows in. And the kind of soil that heavenly wisdom grows in is a fellowship committed to that true wisdom which is living together in peace and seeking true peace, and so both of those things are necessary in order to live the good life.

Now in James chapter 4 verses 1 — 5, James goes on to show us the antithesis of a life lived in accordance with heavenly wisdom. He shows us, frankly, worldliness, and frighteningly he shows us worldliness in the church. Here in James 4 verses 1-5, he gives us the symptoms of worldliness in church, and he gives a diagnosis of worldliness in the church. In verses 6-10 he'll give us his prescription explaining the solution to this problem, but we need to stop, pause and pay close attention to what he says in verses 1-5, because, the church in every generation in which it's not under persecution or marginalized in society, but rather living in a prosperous and peaceful society and relatively prosperous its self, struggles with the sin of worldliness. In fact, in any church setting where the church is prosperous, very much a part of the community and society and culture around it, indeed taking a leadership role in that community, society and culture, its number one challenge is worldliness. And so James is not speaking to something today that is unrelated to our daily lives. This is the challenge we face as individuals and as a congregation everyday of the week everyday of our lives.

I. Selfish desire for personal pleasure/satisfaction is the source of disharmony in the body and in the individual.

I would like you to see two or three things that James teaches here. First in verse 1, James gives us two diagnostic questions, and the answers to those two diagnostic questions gives us the answer to the root of worldliness and broken

fellowship. James asks two questions. What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? And, rhetorically, is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? And in asking those two rhetorical questions, James is teaching us that selfish desire for personal pleasure and satisfaction is the source of disharmony in the body and in disharmony in the individual. Selfish desire for satisfaction is the source of disunity and disharmony in the body as well as in the individual.

James begins by asking two diagnostic questions, which assume a generic struggle with harmony in the Christian community. They are not the diagnostic questions that we are used to hearing asked here at First Presbyterian Church. But they are another kind of diagnostic question. They are a diagnostic question asked to Christians to discern whether they understand their own hearts and the roots of worldliness. James assumes, even though he doesn't know intimate details about all the congregations to which he is writing, he assumes that the problem of harmony is a standard problem in the Christian community. When you come into a Christian church and you see believers estranged from other believers, when you see factions that exist either in a local congregation or in a denomination you shouldn't be surprised. James, Paul, Peter, Jesus, the Old Testament Prophets all expected that to be a standing challenge for the believing community. But though it is a standing challenge we are not to be complacent about it. James even calls that situation of disharmony, disunity, war. That's the metaphor he will use. That's how seriously he takes disharmony in the body of Christ and disunity in the fellowship of believers.

And in the second question that he asks in verse 1. He puts his finger on the real problem. Where does this kind of spiritual disunity come from? It comes, James says, from our personal desire, our desire for personal fulfillment and satisfaction. Is not the source your pleasures? Furthermore, James sees this quest for satisfaction of our desires in military terms. He sees it as an invasion. Not just an invasion of a part of ourselves, but of all of ourselves. Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? In other words, James says this is war. When your personal desires for fulfillment and satisfaction take precedent over your loyalty to God and love for the brethren, it is war. And it is vital for you to understand that James is not just talking about some sort of base, carnal, sexual desire here. He is talking about the desire for personal fulfillment in any and every form. James is talking about the way we devote time and energy and money and interest and enthusiasm in any and every way seeking self-satisfaction. And James sees that as the root of disharmony in the Christian life and in Christian fellowship. And my friends, we live in a world that is bombarding us with the opposite message of James. The world that we live in is saying, the root of the good life, the root of happiness is in seeking yourself, understanding yourself, affirming yourself, pampering yourself, actualizing yourself over and over and over again. The world says to us, if you want to live the good life, you've got to look out for number one.

One such voice saying this to millions and millions week by week is Dr. Phil. Dr. Phillip McGraw, for those of you who are cursed enough to have to look at day time television, have been treated to Dr. Phil, no doubt on Good Morning America, or Oprah, or Larry King. Dr. Phil says that all of our problems need to be worked from the inside out. The way he says to become the person you were always meant to be, is to listen to your inward voice, to connect with your authentic self, the real you. It is about self-acceptance. It is about self-awareness. You have to get intimately in touch with you. It is about self-affirmation, or believing your personal truth that is what you have come to believe about you. The fix I am talking about, says Dr. Phil, always deals with you being true to yourself from the inside out. This approach to life works, says Dr. Phil, because you have within yourself all the resources you need for every situation in life. All of us, he says, you included, have within us everything we will ever need to be do and have anything and everything we will ever want and need. That is a staggering claim. And it is directly and contradictorily to the point and in fact illustrative of the point that James is making here. James is saying that when the quest for personal satisfaction displaces the priority of God and his people disharmony results in the body.

What about the disharmony in your marriage? I don't want in any way to down play the complex and varied components of marital disharmony, but could it be the disharmony that you're experiencing today flows from a deep seated self centeredness in a relationship which requires self denial, in a relationship which requires understanding another first, rather than being understood? Could a deep-seated selfishness be at the root of disharmony in that relationship? How about in the church? Is your estrangement from other Christians, even in this room, related to a deep-seated selfishness? Do you care more about your reputation, your feelings, your needs, your hurts, your wounds then you do about your brothers and sisters in Christ? These kinds of manifestations of a deep-seated selfishness are, in fact, evidences of worldliness, James says.

You see, seeking satisfaction and pleasure isn't just about base or carnal desires, it can be anything and everything in life. And when that quest for personal satisfaction displaces the priority of God in our lives, we are already down the road of worldliness.

And I want to say that even American Christians have fallen prey to a blended version of spirituality. *The Shorter Catechism* says that the chief purpose of life is to glorify God. American Christians really don't believe that. American Christians believe that God is the best way to get the good life, rather than the chief goal of the good life. He's the best means to getting my ends, rather than, my purpose is His glory as my end and goal. To put it another way, John Piper says, "Christ does not exist in order to make much of us, we exist in order to make much of Him." And if we think that God and Christ exist in order to make much of us, in order to fulfill all of the immediate desires that we have, then we have already fallen prey to the worldliness about which James is speaking.

Selfish desire for personal pleasure and satisfaction is at the source of disharmony in the body and in the individual. These two diagnostic questions are designed to draw that reality out and make us to see what it is, to see our own hearts.

II. Broken outward relationships provide the evidence of an inner problem.

Secondly, if you look at verses 2 and 3, James goes on to say that the good life cannot be had without true wisdom and true fellowship, and selfishness destroys them both. In verses 2 and 3, he teaches us that broken outward relationships provide the evidence of an inward problem. How do you know if you have an inward problem of worldliness? He says, well let me show you one example look at your broken outward relationships. In verse 2, he gives two examples, you lust and do not have so you commit murder.

Secondly, you are envious and cannot obtain so you fight in quarrel. Our outward actions which harm believers, friends in Christ, and our outward disunity both betray our inner selfishness. Covetousness and envy are essentially selfish. They represent a self-focused, self-centered existence, and the good life cannot be had by essential selfishness. Why? Because true wisdom, James has already told you in James 3:13-18, true wisdom, heavenly wisdom comes from above. And what is the first principle of true wisdom? The fear of the lord. But the first principle of selfishness is the fear of me, the awe of me, the respect of me, the concern for me. True wisdom is totally opposite from selfishness. True wisdom cannot be had in a selfish heart, and covetousness and envy and all of the outward actions which they result show an essentially selfish heart. And so those broken outward relationships which result from this kind of worldliness show the inner problem.

But he doesn't stop, for in the second half of verses 2 and verse 3 he gives two other examples: Prayerlessness and unanswered pray. He says, look, do you pray? And he suggests that many of you aren't praying. The fact that you are not praying is in fact an indication that you don't look to God for satisfaction. That's not the place you go, you look somewhere else for satisfaction. You look to how you can get it for yourself. You look for it to some other source. But you don't look to God for the answers to the real, basic, deepest, most profound and legitimate needs and satisfactions of life. You don't look to God. You have not, because you do not ask. So he points to prayerlessness as an example of a heart problem.

But there are plenty of people who pray to God for Cadillacs. "Lord give me a Cadillac," or fill in the blank whatever else it may be. And he goes on to say, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives." In other words, you ask God, looking to Him to give you the wrong satisfaction. You see God as a means to your ends, instead of the end itself. You look to God as the

One to give you your desires, however warped they may be, instead of the one who is the desire of your heart.

And so James says that our actions, our factions, and our motives show us a lot about our heart and our heart problems. What do your relationships say about your heart? What does your marriage relationship say to you? What do your friendships say to you? Young people, do you care more about being accepted by your friends than having God as your priority? What do the boyfriends and the girlfriends that you choose say about you? Do you care more about the acceptance of a male and a female friend, a boy friend, a girl friend, than you do about being faithful and loyal to God? Young married couples, you hit the hard places in marriage. You're unhappy, you have a spouse who is inattentive, who has disappointed you deeply, and it's not what you were expecting. Do you care more about God, or do you care more about your own happiness? "I'm just not happy, I'm just not going to stay in this relationship." Do you care more about loyalty to God? Do you care more about pleasing Him? O, do you care more about satisfaction to yourself? The rest of us, what are the things that really satisfy you? Where are the places that you are going to fill the void in you? Is it toys, homes, popularity, cars, power, ambition what is it? Where are we going and what does it say about our priorities? Broken outward relationships wrong priorities in relationships provide the evidence of an inner problem, James says.

III. Friendship with the world (worldliness) means forfeiture of fellowship with God (peace).

And then he says this in verses 4 and 5, friendship with the world means forfeiture of fellowship with God. You can have it one way or the other, but you can't have it both. God will brook no rival in our hearts. In verse 4, James says that worldliness is really spiritual adultery, if you try to be married to Christ and then be joined to another at the same time. Worldliness is spiritual adultery, and the good life and true wisdom cannot be experienced by those who are worldly and selfish.

Verse 5 gives us a summation of the teaching of Scripture, from the beginning to the end. God's Spirit indwells us and wants total occupation. He doesn't want some of you; He wants all of you. I don't mean that collectively; I mean that individually. He doesn't want some of you individually; He wants all of you individually. His Spirit will brook no rival. This is seen from the very beginning of God's salvation, back in Genesis 3:15 when God pronounces His curse against Satan, and then brings His judgment to Eve. He blesses her in the midst of the warning judgments by saying, "I will put enmity between you and the serpent, between your seed and his seed." In other words, I will put enmity between you and the enemy of your soul.

And so God has established an enmity against the world and against worldliness

in His peoples' hearts. And He will brook no rival because He wants all of you, individually. He wants the totality of your love and loyalty and service. And James simply states categorically that friendship with the world is hostility to God, and that if we want to make ourselves to be friends of the world, then we will be enemies of God. It's one way or the other. And my friends, living in a culture which is prosperous, in which we play a significant role, can work on our hearts over time to make us desire the wrong source of satisfaction. It's the great, great challenge that we face here. Who do you love? What do you love? Where is your satisfaction? What's the chief purpose of your life? The honest answers the quiet answers in your own home and your own heart to those questions will tell you much about what you need.

If the answer is not God through Jesus Christ, to the question of, "Whom do you love? What do you want? What's your great satisfaction?" then the only hope is not to look within, because the answers are not found within; they're found without, they're found with God in Christ. May God grant us all to look to Him, to walk with Him. Let's pray.

O Lord grant us a closer walk with You that we might not love the world and the things thereof, in Jesus name, Amen.

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