

July 1, 2007

James 4:1-3

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are here today. Grab your Bibles and let's start the next chapter in our study of the letter of James. Open your Bibles to James chapter 4 this morning. We're just going to be able to crack the surface of this chapter today, so let's begin with verses 1-3. Add memory verses of chapter 3.

TEXT

If you were here the last couple of weeks as we looked at the end of chapter three, then this wording here in verses 1 and 2 seems like quite a lane change from where James was at the end of chapter 3. The sort of peaceful description of wisdom that comes from God – wisdom that is pure and peace loving and considerate and submissive and all that and now he explodes into chapter 4 with where do all these fights and quarrels come from?

Well they don't come from the wisdom of God – rather these things are indicative of what he described back in verse 14 of chapter 3 – the bitter envy and selfish ambition that marks the wisdom of this world, the wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil that leads to disorder and every evil practice.

So we need to establish a starting point today. And the starting point is nothing really profound, but we need to say it all the same, and that is that **God values PEACE.**

That was God's original game plan for human relationships. I know we live in a world now that is fraught with conflict and strife but it hasn't always been that way. In the Garden of Eden there were no fights. Their relationship was one of unity and safety and rest and happiness. They were at peace with each other and with God and that was what God intended.

Then they sinned and as a result lost their peace with God which led to a loss of peace with each other. Where once there was love now there was hate, where once was peace, now there was strife.

But God because of his grace sent Jesus into the world to restore these broken relationships. Jesus enables us to have peace with God and to live at peace with each other.

So God's desire for human relationships is peace. There will be conflict because we live in a sinful world. There will be conflict because people don't always want to hear the truth. But God's Word makes God's heart very clear – in **Romans 12:18** he says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

God values peace, and really, so do we. We know how relationships with others can be so good, so valuable, so sweet when they are at peace. The Psalmist said it for us when he wrote in **Psalm 133:1**, "How good it is when brothers dwell together in unity."

Unfortunately we all know that even though peace is so valuable, the sad truth is that most human relationships are not characterized by peace, at least not for long. Instead, all too often and all too easily strife and conflict and quarrels mark our relationships.

That's not a fact I need to prove to you. I mean I could say look at history and all the wars and battles we have been in. Look at the nightly news and all the strife and crime and conflict. But you don't need those things to know this problem is real, just look at your own history. Go back to when you were 3 or even 2 years old and already your relationships were strained by conflict. Those of you with more than one kid at home know this every day. Those kids do fine together until one of them ends up with a toy the other one wants. Then conflict. It's an almost immediate reaction. Go to any playground at any elementary school during recess and you'll see conflict.

Unfortunately we don't graduate from conflict when we graduate from elementary school. It starts there and continues through life. That's why books like Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus sell so fast. Everybody experiences strife and everyone is trying to figure out how to deal with it. And that's what James is going to talk about next. You see it isn't just unbelievers that have conflict. I wish they were. But they're not. In fact one unbeliever named Spinoza once remarked:

"I have often wondered that persons who make boast of professing Christian religion – and as a result profess the importance of love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men – should quarrel with such rancorous animosity and display towards one another such bitter hatred that this, rather than the virtues they profess, is the readiest criteria of their faith."

That's been an ugly stain on the church and its reputation. God is honored when we live at peace. God is dishonored when we don't. So this morning, I want you to think of James as an expert surgeon. The church is spiritually sick. In chapter 3 he begins by exposing the problem. There were men who wanted to be leaders in the church but who did not control their speech. They professed to love God on one hand and on the other used their tongues to tear others down. So James reveals to them this contradiction and explains the difference between God's wisdom and the world's wisdom – that God promotes peace and building others up and the world promotes sinful conflict and tearing others down.

But knowing the problem isn't enough. All of you this morning before you got here would agree with all of this. Strife and conflict is bad. Peace is good. We need to know the cause of the problem and how to deal with it. And that's what we're going to work through in chapter 4.

In verse 1 he asks, what is the source – what causes the **fight**s and **quarrel**s among you?

That sounds kind of mild to us, but the actual terms he uses here are **WARS and BATTLES**. The word for **war** refers to a **CONSTANT state of war** and the word for **battle** refers to **SEPARATE battles in that war**. So listen – he's not talking about neutral disagreements. Those are going to happen. He's not talking about taking a stand for truth and having other people oppose you for it. That's going to happen since we live in a sinful, selfish world.

He's talking about **fight**s and **quarrel**s that **DISHONOR God and HARM one another**. Why do you do that? Why do you tear each other down? Why do you seek to harm others? Why do you war and battle against each other?

Prepare yourself. James' answer isn't like anything you'll hear from the world.

See the world says people fight because they have different personalities.

People fight because they grew up in bad homes.

People fight because they aren't educated or don't have much money.

People fight because they have low self esteem.

People fight because they lack skill in conflict resolution.

People fight because they haven't learned the strategies and techniques that are necessary for successful communication.

Wrong. According to James.

And it gets more personal than that. James' answer is not only not the world's excuses; it is different than what we tell ourselves.

I'm fighting with my wife because of what she said to me.

I'm fighting with my husband because he's so inconsiderate.

I'm fighting with my kids because they don't respect me how I deserve.

I'm fighting with my boss because he's not listening to me.

I'm fighting with my fellow employees because they aren't working as hard as they should.

Wrong. Again – according to James.

James says you have problems with others because of a problem WITHIN YOU. It is the most natural thing in the world to blame our fights on others. But it's also wrong. Look at what he says. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want."

You may want to underline "within you." He says stop pointing the finger at someone else and start pointing it at you.

The Greek word behind the word "**desires**" there is "**hedonon**" where we get the word "hedonist" – someone who lives for their own pleasure. James says you and I quarrel because **our desire for PLEASURE literally wages war within us.**

James says "you want something but don't get it; you kill and covet but cannot have what you want." You have this desire for your own personal pleasure and here's the key – it's frustrated – something gets in its way – you don't get what you want. Three times he says that in this passage. That's where the quarrels begin.

Fights, quarrels are all about FRUSTRATED DESIRES. You don't fight when you get what you want. There's a commercial for the show "The Closer" on TNT right now that shows one female character arguing with a male character and the guy says what will it take for you to stop fighting with me and her response is "stop being wrong" – in other words – see things my way. That's kind of blunt but that's the truth. You don't fight if you get your way. You fight because you aren't.

Now that's not that complicated. It's so crazy that people get into all these really complicated and convoluted explanations of why we fight and quarrel with each other when really the answer is simple. It's the same as when we were kids. We don't get what we want or we want what others have and so we get upset until we get it. And if we don't get it, sparks fly.

Now listen to me – someone might legitimately say here – James are you saying that all desire is wrong? Are we as Christians just supposed to be stoics who don't feel anything – who don't want anything – who don't have any desires?

Of course not. That's not the biblical picture at all. **Not all desire is WRONG – the problem and the reason you have quarrels is because you don't deal with those desires CORRECTLY.**

Look at the next phrase of verses 2. You do not have because you do not ask God. You have desires. But you are not looking to God. You are not praying to God about those desires. Instead – look – **you're looking to MAN to satisfy your desires instead of GOD.** You're using man made methods to get what you want. You've got these desires, they're frustrated, so you fight, you quarrel, you even kill.

Do you see what James is saying here? Why do you fight with other people? Here's a key – you fight because you want them to give you what you want. Most of us don't have fights with brick walls. You might get mad and punch a wall sometime. I know when I was a kid on one particularly bad hair day I punched a hole in my bathroom wall and hid it with a towel for like a week. But most of us don't stand there in front of a wall arguing and yelling at it explaining why it ought to get out of your way. If you spend a lot of time arguing with brick walls, we have a special place just for you. You don't argue with a wall because you know no matter how long you stand there and yell at it, it's not going to change.

But you do fight with people, because you want something out of them. You think that by fighting and arguing you are going to change them – you are going to manipulate them into giving you what you

want and if you give up hope on that, then things turn more violent and you want to make them pay, you want revenge, and that's when people do the kinds of things James talked about in the beginning of this verse, even so far as to kill.

But James says **the proper way to deal with those desires is to go to God in PRAYER.** God's given us a real legitimate method for dealing with our desires and that's prayer.

I Jn 5:14-15 says"

14 *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*

15 *And if we know that he hears us-- whatever we ask-- we know that we have what we asked of him.*

Real practically what does this mean for us? It means this. **You have a problem with fights and quarrels; you have a problem with your PRAYER life.**

You're dealing with your desires all wrong, you're trying to squeeze out of men what you should be going to God about.

Now you might say – wait a minute pastor – hold on Brett – I do go to God. I do pray. I pray about my desires – that's all I pray about! But God's not answering. It's like he doesn't even hear me.

James has an answer for that as well. But you might not like it.

He says in verse 3: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

God is not some magic charm you rub to get what you want. Prayer is not a type of magic or formula that you chant and all your desires are met – no you can't manipulate God. James says you ask, you plead, you beg God to give you what you want but you don't receive an answer because you are praying with evil motives. Now James is getting to the heart of the problem.

It's not wrong to pray about your desires, the problem was and is that they and we so often pray for only one reason – James says "that you might spend what you get on your own pleasures."

We'll look more at this next week, but basically your prayers are all about you. You are trying to do to God what you do to people. You use people to get what you want and when you pray you are trying to use God to get what you want.

God is not our lucky charm. He's God. We are not the center of the universe. He is. And **it's because our PERSONAL desires are our reference point rather than GOD'S desires that our prayers are wrong and why we end up having all these fights and quarrels.** It goes back to what James said in verse 14 – bitter envy and selfish ambition.

We come to God to dictate what we want for our own pleasure instead of coming to God and saying "God, to me this is what would be best – this is what I would like – but God I know I don't know everything and I know that your way is best, so I'm asking for what I can figure out but what I want is whatever glorifies you through me. So God give me what's best and give me the grace to trust you in the mean time."

What God is showing us through James this morning is that we have problems externally because we have problems internally. And we have problems internally because we have problems in our prayer lives.

He's going to take us one step deeper before he gets there, but he is going to give us the solution. But this week what I challenge you to think about is why do you have conflict in your life? What desires are you trying to get met through people that only God can meet? What is the reality of your prayer life? Do you pray? When you pray, why do you pray? Do you really believe that God's way is best – that God's Word is true – and that you can trust him? Is that the starting point of your prayers?

This week before you unleash on someone in your life – ask God to show you what's behind it – and before you POINT the finger in conflict at others, find the PURPOSE behind it in your heart. And remember who we are – and as we saw in Romans:
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.