

NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 4 (PT 1)

JAMES HAS A REPUTATION OF BEING STRAIGHTFORWARD. WE'VE SEEN THIS SO FAR IN HIS LETTER. HOWEVER, SOME OF HIS MOST DIRECT AND HARD SAYINGS ARE FOUND HERE IN JAMES 4. BUCKLE UP READERS, HERE WE GO.

JAMES 4:1-10

JAMES 4:1-3 - SOURCE OF QUARRELS & CONFLICTS

"JAMES CHOOSES THE VOCABULARY OF WAR TO EXPRESS CONTROVERSIES AND QUARRELS, ANIMOSITIES AND BAD FEELINGS AMONG CHRISTIANS, NOT BECAUSE THERE IS NO OTHER WAY OF SAYING IT, BUT BECAUSE THERE IS NO OTHER WAY OF EXPRESSING THE HORROR OF IT. HE IS SEEING THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE CHURCH THROUGH THE EYE OF GOD... 'WAR' REPRESENTS A CONTINUING STATE OF HOSTILITY AND 'FIGHTINGS' A SPECIFIC OUTBURST OF ACTIVE ANTAGONISM, ENDURING FEUDS WITH RECURRING QUARRELS FLARING UP" ("THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY: THE MESSAGE OF JAMES", J.A. MOTYER, PAGE 141))

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY YOU FIGHT? WHY THERE IS CONFLICT AND CONTENTION IN YOUR LIFE AND IN THE WORLD? JAMES PLAINLY GIVES US THE ANSWER. PLEASURE, LUST, ENVY. IN OTHER WORDS, THE INNER SELFISH DESIRES WITHIN EACH OF US ARE THE SOURCE OF THESE PROBLEMS.

STILL NOT CONVINCED? MOTYER SAYS THAT *"ALL OUR DESIRES AND PASSIONS ARE LIKE AN ARMED CAMP WITHIN US, READY AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE TO DECLARE WAR AGAINST ANYONE WHO STANDS IN THE WAY OF SOME PERSONAL GRATIFICATION ON WHICH WE HAVE SET OUR HEARTS."* (IBID, PAGE 142). IF YOU STAND IN THE WAY OF SOMETHING I WANT, THERE'S GOING TO BE A PROBLEM. OUR DESIRE FOR PEACE, PLEASURE, COMFORT, JOY, LOVE, AFFECTION, ENCOURAGEMENT, EASE, SUCCESS, QUIET, SLEEP, FOOD, MONEY, SEX, ETC. ETC. MUST NOT BE THWARTED BY ANYONE OR ANYTHING! WHEN WE DON'T GET WHAT WE WANT, THERE IS WAR.

CONSIDER THIS. WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF PLEASURE, LUST, AND ENVY? CONTENTMENT, CONTENTMENT AND CONTENTMENT. IF WE WERE CONTENT IN LIFE AND REALIZED THAT WE REALLY WANT/NEED IS FOUND IN CHRIST, THE BATTLE COULD END.

V. 28-3 - THIS ISN'T JUST TALKING ABOUT ASKING FOR MATERIAL "STUFF" RATHER THAN SPIRITUAL STUFF...BUT LET US CONSIDER THE CONTEXT OF THIS SECTION AND WHAT WE MIGHT BE "ASKING FOR" (OR RATHER NOT ASKING FOR) IN REGARDS TO THE STRIFE AND CONTENTIONS IN OUR LIFE.

IT IS EASY TO ASSUME THAT IT'S "EVERYONE ELSE'S FAULT" THAT THERE IS STRIFE IN YOUR LIFE, BUT HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED WHAT YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE EQUATION? WHEN YOU ARE IN A QUARREL WITH SOMEONE, IF YOU PRAY AT ALL, WHAT DO YOU PRAY FOR? MANY OF US WHEN WE'RE AT OUR BEST WILL PRAY FOR GOD TO CHANGE/WORK IN THE HEART OF THE OTHER PERSON TO HELP THE CONFLICT END ("GOD, PLEASE HELP BOBBY SEE HIS PRIDE, SO THAT HE CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT I CONFRONTED HIM ABOUT" "LORD, PLEASE CHANGE BETTY'S HEART SO THAT WE CAN HAVE RECONCILIATION.") THOSE ARE GOOD THINGS TO PRAY.

HOWEVER, HOW OFTEN WHEN WE HAVE STRIFE OR CONTENTION IN OUR LIVES DO WE PRAY THIS:

"LORD, HELP ME SEE HOW I MIGHT BE WRONG HERE?" "FATHER, CAN YOU SHOW ME THE LOG IN MY EYE?" "GOD, CAN YOU HELP ME TO CARE LESS ABOUT MYSELF AND MORE ABOUT OTHERS?" YIKES! THOSE ARE DANGEROUS PRAYERS. JUST IMAGINE IF GOD ANSWERED A PRAYER LIKE THAT AND THE REASON WHY CONFLICT ENDED WAS BECAUSE WE CHANGED AND DIDN'T CARE ANYMORE ABOUT "WINNING" THE ARGUMENT AND STARTED CARING MORE ABOUT "LOVING" THE OTHER PERSON(S).

SO JAMES SAYS..."YOU HAVE NOT BECAUSE YOU ASK NOT, AND WHEN YOU DO ASK, YOU'RE ASKING FOR THE WRONG REASONS (WRONG MOTIVES)." THE PRIMARY AIM OF OUR LIFE SHOULD BE TO GLORIFY GOD AND BE MORE CONFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF JESUS. CONFLICT WITH OTHERS PROVIDE A TREMENDOUS, YET OFTEN IGNORED, OPPORTUNITY TO MODEL THE HEART AND WORDS AND ACTIONS OF JESUS. REMEMBER, JAMES IS ECHOING THE MASTER...LET'S REMEMBER WHAT JESUS SAID:

MATTHEW 5:25 - "MAKE FRIENDS QUICKLY WITH YOUR OPPONENT AT LAW WHILE YOU ARE WITH HIM ON THE WAY, SO THAT YOUR OPPONENT MAY NOT HAND YOU OVER TO THE JUDGE, AND THE JUDGE TO THE OFFICER, AND YOU BE THROWN INTO PRISON.

MATTHEW 5:38-41 - "YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' 39 "BUT I SAY TO YOU, DO NOT RESIST AN EVIL PERSON; BUT WHOEVER SLAPS YOU ON YOUR RIGHT CHEEK, TURN THE OTHER TO HIM ALSO. 40 "IF ANYONE WANTS TO SUE YOU AND TAKE YOUR SHIRT, LET HIM HAVE YOUR COAT ALSO. 41 "WHOEVER FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO.

MATTHEW 5:44-46 - "BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, 45 SO THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN; FOR HE CAUSES HIS SUN TO RISE ON THE EVIL AND THE GOOD, AND SENDS RAIN ON THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS. 46 "FOR IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHAT REWARD DO YOU HAVE? DO NOT EVEN THE TAX COLLECTORS DO THE SAME?

AND PAUL WILL ADD:

ROMANS 12:17-19, 21 - NEVER PAY BACK EVIL FOR EVIL TO ANYONE. RESPECT WHAT IS RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF ALL MEN. 18 IF POSSIBLE, SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, BE AT PEACE WITH ALL MEN. 19 NEVER TAKE YOUR OWN REVENGE, BELOVED, BUT LEAVE ROOM FOR THE WRATH OF GOD, FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," SAYS THE LORD....21 DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL, BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.

JAMES 4:4-5 - WHOSE FRIEND ARE YOU?

AN ADULTERER IS SOMEONE WHO COMMITS *"VOLUNTARY SEXUAL INTERCOURSE BETWEEN A MARRIED PERSON AND SOMEONE OTHER THAN THAT PERSON'S CURRENT SPOUSE OR PARTNER"* (MERRIAM WEBSTER DICTIONARY VIA M-W.COM).

Q - WHY IS THIS USED OF THOSE WHO ARE ATTEMPTING TO BE A FRIEND OF THE WORLD AND A FRIEND OF GOD?

WHAT JAMES IS *NOT* TALKING ABOUT HERE IS THE CALL UPON A CHRISTIAN TO BE A LIGHT UNTO THE WORLD, A FRIEND OF SINNERS, ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN, ETC. INSTEAD HE IS TALKING ABOUT THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT MADE A CLEAN BREAK FROM THE WAYS, THOUGHTS, HABITS, AND BEHAVIORS OF THE WORLD. THE "WORLD" IS A SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF THE SYSTEM OF THIS EVIL AGE. THE OPPOSITE OF THE "WORLD" IS "GOD".

Q - HOW DO YOU BEHAVE AS A FRIEND TO SOMEONE?

UNDERSTANDING HOW WE ACT WHEN WE ARE FRIENDS WITH SOMEONE CAN HELP US UNDERSTAND WHAT JAMES IS TALKING ABOUT HERE. HERE'S HOW WEBSTER'S DEFINES "FRIEND":

- ONE ATTACHED TO ANOTHER BY AFFECTION OR ESTEEM
- ONE THAT IS NOT HOSTILE (AS OPPOSED TO AN ENEMY)
- A FAVORED COMPANION
- A PERSON WHO YOU LIKE AND ENJOY BEING WITH (WEBSTER'S ENGLISH LEARNERS DEFINITION)

WE FOSTER FRIENDSHIPS IN VARIOUS WAYS:

- SPENDING TIME TOGETHER
- COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER
- SHARING LIFE EVENTS WITH EACH OTHER
- BECOMING VULNERABLE WITH EACH OTHER

A FRIEND IS A PERSON YOU INVOLVE IN SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS IN YOUR LIFE. YOU WANT TO TALK/BE WITH A FRIEND:

- WHEN SOMETHING GOOD HAPPENS (CELEBRATIONS, GOOD NEWS, FUN)
- WHEN SOMETHING BAD HAPPENS (TRAGEDY, LOSS, SORROW)
- WHEN YOU NEED HELP (MOVING FURNITURE, GETTING ADVICE, WHEN YOU WANT TO FEEL BETTER)

LOOKING AT WHAT A "FRIEND" REALLY IS HELPS US SEE WHY JAMES USES THIS LANGUAGE HERE. IN MOST AREAS OF LIFE WE ARE ALLOWED TO HAVE MORE THAN JUST ONE FRIEND, BUT IN THIS RELATIONSHIP, OUR TWO OPTIONS OF FRIENDS ARE SWORN ENEMIES AND COMPLETELY INCOMPATIBLE. WE'RE EITHER A FRIEND OF THE WORLD, AND AN ENEMY OF GOD OR A FRIEND OF GOD AND AN ENEMY OF THE WORLD. WE MAY NOT WISH TO BE AN ENEMY OF GOD, BUT WE BECOME THAT WHEN WE CONTINUE A FRIENDSHIP RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD.

V. 5 - GOD IS JEALOUS, IN THE BEST WAY

THE LANGUAGE JAMES HAS USED IN CHAPTER 4 TO DESCRIBE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS DEEP. MARRIAGE (ADULTERESSES) AND FRIENDSHIP (FRIEND/ENEMY). SCRIPTURE TEACHES US THAT THE LORD IS A "JEALOUS GOD" (EXODUS 20:5, 34:14, DEUTERONOMY 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; JOSHUA 24:19; NAHUM 1:2). THIS IS NOT A PETTY JEALOUSY LIKE WISHING YOU HAD A NICE CAR LIKE YOUR NEIGHBOR. THIS IS A DEEP AND PASSIONATE JEALOUSY LIKE A HUSBAND/WIFE WHO IS IN LOVE WITH AND DEVOTED TO HIS WIFE/HUSBAND OR A MOTHER WHO WILL NOT ALLOW EVIL TO AFFECT HER CHILDREN. WITHOUT "JEALOUSY" WITHIN AND FOR THOSE RELATIONSHIPS, THOSE RELATIONSHIPS AREN'T TRUE.

HERE JAMES QUOTES THE GENERAL SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURE WHICH TEACHES THAT GOD IS VERY CONCERNED AND COMMITTED TO ANYWHERE OR ANYONE THAT HAS HIS SPIRIT. GOD WANTS YOU FOR HIS OWN. HE DOESN'T WANT TO SHARE YOU WITH HIS ENEMY (THE WORLD). HE KNOWS HIS ENEMY WILL HURT AND DEFILE YOU AND SO HE'S JEALOUS FOR THAT RELATIONSHIP! AND THOUGH THIS ISN'T SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED - THE WORLD IS JEALOUS FOR YOU AS WELL. THE "WORLD" DOESN'T WANT TO LET YOU GO WITH GOD AND WILL FIGHT TO KEEP THAT FRIENDSHIP AS WELL! THIS REALLY IS A WAR!

Q - WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "DRAW NEAR TO GOD?"

Q - HOW DOES ONE "CLEANSE THEIR HANDS"?

Q - WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT WE TURN OUR "LAUGHTER INTO MOURNING" AND BE MISERABLE, MOURN AND WEEP?

RATHER THAN STOKING SELFISHLY INDUCED FIGHTING, RATHER THAN BEING A FRIEND OF THE WORLD (AND AN ENEMY OF GOD), WHY NOT COME NEAR TO GOD (LIKE A FRIEND WOULD PERHAPS?), MOURN OVER THE BROKENNESS IN THAT RELATIONSHIP, AND LIVE IN THE GRACE (LOVING HELP AND ASSISTANCE) THAT GOD SO DESIRES TO GIVE. JAMES GIVES US SOME VERY BLUNT TRUTH IN THIS SECTION AND LIKEWISE GIVES US SOME BLUNT DIRECTION AS TO WHERE WE SHOULD LIVE.

WHEN WE "DIVORCE" OURSELVES FROM A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD, IT MAY LEAD TO SOME MOURNING AND SORROW. WE HAVE LIVED FOR OURSELVES FOR TOO LONG, AND THERE WILL LIKELY BE SOME PAIN INVOLVED IN THE END OF THAT RELATIONSHIP, JUST LIKE IN ANY TIME A RELATIONSHIP ENDS WHERE OUR HEART WAS INVESTED. HUMBLING OURSELVES WILL NEVER BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORDS "FUN" OR "LAUGHTER". BUT HUMBLING OURSELVES AND DRAWING NEAR TO GOD DOES LEAD TO LIFE AND JOY AND PEACE AND HEALING AND FUTURE EXALTATION.

THE **BEST** OFFER OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD IS THIS: FUN, PLEASURE, EXCITEMENT, ACCEPTANCE, SELF-DETERMINATION AND EVENTUAL DEATH.

THE **BASIC** OFFER OF A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS THIS: JOY, TRIALS, FORGIVENESS, STRUGGLE, FREEDOM, RELATIONSHIP, AND EVENTUAL LIFE IN THE AGE TO COME.

OUR MODERN AMERICAN CONTEXT DOESN'T LIKE BEING PRESSURED INTO SOMETHING. AND IT IS TRUE WE DON'T "HAVE TO" MAKE A DECISION AS TO WHICH SIDE WE ARE ON RIGHT NOW. BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT WE DON'T KNOW WHEN OUR LAST CHANCE TO MAKE THAT DECISION IS. IF YOU PLAN TO MAKE THE CHOICE TO BE A FRIEND OF GOD IN 2019, THERE IS NO GUARANTEE YOU'LL BE THERE TO MAKE IT. GOD DOESN'T PRESSURE US. TIME ITSELF IS APPLYING THE PRESSURE.

WHY NOT CHOOSE TO BE A FRIEND OF GOD TODAY? A REAL, FULL TIME, DEVOTED, UNADULTERATED, HUMBLE, PASSIONATE, FRIEND OF THE LOVING, POWERFUL CREATOR GOD WHO NOT ONLY WANTS TO BE OUR FRIEND, BUT WANTS TO BE OUR FATHER! GOD PROMISES TO HELP THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO LIVE FOR HIM. HE "GIVES A GREATER GRACE" TO THE HUMBLE (JAMES 4:6)! BUT HE OPPOSES THOSE WHO ARE PROUD AND THUS SAY OR IMPLY THEY DON'T NEED HIM.

ON OUR LAST DAY WE WON'T REGRET THINGS RELATED TO OUR JOB, OUR MONEY, OUR TECHNOLOGY, OUR POLITICS OR OUR SPORTS TEAMS. YET THOSE ARE THE THINGS WE ARE TEMPTED TO FOCUS OUR LIVES ON. WHAT WE WILL BE MINDFUL OF ON OUR LAST DAY IS OUR RELATIONSHIPS. OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND MOST IMPORTANTLY OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

DON'T SAVE YOUR TEARS FOR YOUR DEATHBED. TAKE THE TIME TO CONSIDER YOUR WAYS AND TURN TOWARDS GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. EVEN THOSE OF US WHO HAVE MADE THIS DECISION ALREADY - HOW CAN WE DRAW EVEN CLOSER? HE IS READY TO RECEIVE YOU, READY TO WELCOME AND DRAW CLOSE TO THOSE WHO ARE MOVING TOWARDS HIM.