

James 4:1-3

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[0:00] Please take a copy of God's Word and join me in James chapter 4. I of the early church.

In Acts 2, verse 42 and following, we read, And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing to the proceeds to all as any had

Need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. What a wonderful observation of the life of this early church.

[1:24] They found themselves, after the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, a great multitude of people brought to faith in Christ. A revitalization amongst God's people.

And we want our churches to look like this. But we must be careful that we don't idolize the early church.

Some people want to put some formulaic equation to, if we would just do this, then this is what it would produce. And we have to be so careful because it doesn't take long for the early church to become a mess.

The New Testament is replete with the church falling apart. The occasion for the writing of most of the epistles is because something has gone awry.

The letter that James wrote that we have spent the past few months studying was meant to be circulated amongst Jewish Christian churches outside of Palestine. And James writes this letter concerns that its readers were not acting according to the word of God.

[2:35] They were hearers, but not doers. This is the theme of this book. Be hearers and doers of God's word.

And news had reached him that this wasn't the case in these churches. That there was a lot going on that wasn't okay. They had developed social conflict between the rich and the poor and between factions in the church.

And we pick up these clues throughout it as he is both rebuking and exhorting them. For the sake of time, I won't go through each of those texts. But I would encourage you to read the first three chapters of James with that in mind.

Why is James addressing these churches in this way? See specifically James chapter 2 verse 1 through 11, chapter 1 verse 19 through 26, and chapter 3 verse 1, chapter 3 verse 14 and verse 16, chapter 3 verse 9 and 10.

All of these things pointing at this conflict that was taking place in the life of these churches. All of this varied mess leads James to the exhortation he makes at the end of chapter 3.

[3:50] So before we read our text for today, I'd like to read last week's text beginning in verse 13 of James chapter 3. He writes, Who is wise and understanding among you?

By his good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. But his earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. So to have churches that are healthy, churches full of people who both hear and do the word of God, will take careful attention to what our Lord has spoken, and it will take work.

[5:15] They don't just naturally, apart from God's good word and a spirit enacting it in our lives, become healthy. And James is going directly at this problem as he begins chapter 4.

Right? It's coming off. Remember, the chapter breaks, not inspired. Right? They help us find where we're going. Right? But his flow of logic is coming right off of this. Right? Don't present yourself wise.

If you're going to be vile, have selfish ambition, be jealous. Right? This is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Because the wisdom from above is pure and peaceable and gentle and open to reason and full of mercy and good fruits.

Right? It brings forth peace, not division, not conflict. So with that in mind, let's read James chapter 4, verses 1 through 3.

And before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good. And so we would do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises, and obey its commands.

[6:24] James 4, verse 1. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

You desire and 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. Now this morning we have a simple three-point outline.

It's astounding how many texts fall into a three-point outline. That really seems to be the inspired sermon outline. Three-point outline, and it's this.

Number one, the source of conflict. Number two, the cause and effect of conflict. And number three, the prayerlessness of conflict.

[7:26] So number one, the source of conflict, found in verse one. James begins with a question, and then he follows with the rhetorical question to give the answer.

So what is it that causes quarrels, and what causes fights among you? And then he answers it. Is it not this? He answers, yes, it is this, that your passions are at war within you.

A more literal translation of the first question could read, this is the Greek, more directly, it's not good English, but could be this, from where wars, and from where fights among you.

What is its source? This conflict, all of these things that he's been listing out, all this aforementioned conflict, up to the beginning of chapter four, why?

Why does this happen? And the answer comes immediately. Your passions are at war within you.

[8:29] Your passions are warring, and they come out, and they cause wars. The immediate application, as we have seen, is for conflict within the church.

But there is an appropriate and broader application to all of our conflict. Our hearts are fickle, they get confused, we often forget where our allegiance lies, we forget the sin that we've been delivered from, and who we've been delivered to.

Our sin, at its core, is most readily an identity conflict. That when I sin, I forget, that I have been redeemed, by the blood of Jesus Christ.

I have been called his brother, and I'm an adopted child of God most high, who's given to me good commands, that I might order my life, in a way that is both good for me, and honoring to him.

I forget, because my heart is fickle. When this happens, conflict is often the result. So if you are in conflict with someone, whether within our church, or outside the church, you need to take a careful look at your heart.

[9:50] Keep asking the question, why? Go a little deeper, and a little deeper, and a little deeper. Expose the issue of your heart. Now, I will say that it is possible to be sinless in a conflict.

Sometimes people just invite it, right? It just comes upon you, and you've done nothing wrong, but I will say, quickly, that it's not likely. A rare occasion, that you play no part at all, in some conflict, in your life.

So the teaching of these three verses, is of great importance, to each, and every, one of us. I don't want you to sit there, and go, I'm not in conflict with anybody, in the church. Everything's great.

Our church, is generally, conflict free. There's a lot of peace and unity, in our church. Praise be to God. But we have all, had conflict, and we all will have, conflict, in our life.

And so this question, and this answer, are extremely important. What causes this? From, where, does it, come? And the answer is, it comes, from our hearts.

[11:01] The word here, translated, passions, is the Greek word, hedone, from which we get, our word, hedonism.

Now, hedonism is, an ethical theory, that pleasure, in the sense of, satisfying your, every desire, very consumeristic, very self-focused, is the highest good, of mankind, right, is this, theory.

Seems that our culture, whether they, would admit it or not, that's very hedonistic, in this way, right, if I want something, I should deserve it, and I should get it, now, right, pleasure on, demand.

John McMurray, who was an early 20th century, Scottish philosopher, said, the best cure for hedonism, is an attempt, to practice it. Because this is not, the way the world works.

The world, does not revolve, around, you. Some of us, think that it does. I know that our, children, certainly think so. And some of us, haven't outgrown, that thought.

[12:06] The world does not exist, to serve, you. So when James here says, your passions, are at war, within you, he's communicating, that you desire, some pleasure, that you cannot have, and this is the source, of your conflict.

Now this word, hedonay, is only used, two other places, in the New Testament, and in both cases, it's translated, pleasures. So in Luke 8, Jesus tells the parable, of the sower, and in verse 14, he says, and as for what fell, among the thorns, they are those, who hear, but as they go, on their way, they are choked, by the cares, and riches, and pleasures, of life, and their fruit, does not mature.

I suggest, that James intends, for his original hearers, and for us, to have our minds, drawn to this. This is not the way, Christian people, ought to be, controlled, right?

Christian people, are good soil people, where that word, is planted, and it takes root, and it brings forth, the fruit, of righteousness. It's also used, by Paul, in Titus chapter 3, and verse 3, speaking about, who God's people, once were.

He says, for we ourselves, were once, foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves, to various passions, or think desire, and pleasures, passing our days, in malice, and envy, hated by others, and hating, one another, right?

[13:46] Paul and James, would have gotten together, on this issue, of the heart, causing conflict, and been in entire agreement, with one another, right? But it's who we, once were, shouldn't be characteristic, of us, anymore.

Now this war, of pleasure, in our hearts, can take on, many forms, and I don't think, it should be limited, to the obvious things, money, sex, food, etc.

Those are kind of, on the surface, but it should also, be extended, to more, deceptive things, like, comfort, or power, or respect, status, of some, kind.

I think, this is the way, it's going to tend to, bear itself out, in the life of, our church, and amongst our friends, and family members, right? I want to be, respected, right?

I want to have, status amongst you, and when I don't, feel like I get it, conflict may ensue. Beloved, we can desire, good things, for, wrong, reasons.

[14:54] James is going to say, a little more about this, in a moment. It's altogether possible, to desire something, that is, good, but make it, idolatrous, in your life, make it about you, serving, your, passion, your, pleasure.

If the desires, of our heart, aren't producing, the fruits, of righteousness, then the desires, of our heart, need a very, careful, assessment.

Let me just read again, back up into chapter 3, verse 16, and following. For where jealousy, and selfish ambition, exist, there's, there's the condition, of the heart, there will be disorder, and every

vile, practice.

But the wisdom, from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

And a harvest, of righteousness, is sown in peace, by those, who make, peace. These should be, the characterizing, qualities, of those, who are found, in Christ.

[16:07] We say this often, will we do this, with perfection? Of course we won't, the side of glory. But we ought to be, ever moving, in this direction. And when we fail, we should be those, who are quick, to repent, to make the appropriate, apologies, to one another, that we might, press on, in peace.

And so we see, this source, what causes it? Where does it come from? It comes from, your heart, your passions, making war, coming out, and making, more, war.

So secondly, let's consider together, the kind of the cause, and effect, of conflict. So this is the beginning, of verse 2. James writes, you desire, and do not have, so you murder.

You covet, and cannot obtain, so you fight, and quarrel. Now we do not know, if an actual murder, had taken place, in one of these churches.

But it's possible, that it had. It may have been, that kind of an occasion, for the writing, of this letter. I don't know, that we should immediately, take it figuratively.

[17:21] He very well, may have been saying, you remember that time? That time, that that kind of conflict, arose amongst you? That somebody was killed, as a result of it?

But, even if that had been, the case, I think that James, is doing, something more complex here. So, even if there had been, an actual murder, that had taken place, it wouldn't have ended there. I think he, means, his readers minds, to be drawn, to the story, of King David, and Uriah, the Hittite. Remember, this is a Jewish audience, and they would have been, very familiar, with King David. I think he's meaning, to show them, hoping, that they're in Christ, that they're being, followers of Jesus, the heir of King David, right? The man after God's, own heart.

That they're meant, to see, that they also, ought to be brought, to repentance, the way, King David, was brought, to repentance. So, you can read about this, in 2 Samuel chapter, 11.

[18:24] Recall that, David wanted, Uriah's wife. He saw her bathing, on a roof. He wanted her for himself, so he, took her. When he found out, that she was pregnant, he called Uriah, who was off, fighting, a battle, on David's behalf, to himself, to try to get him, to go be with his wife, so that that child, could be Uriah's child, and not his, child.

And, Uriah, being a soldier, refused to go home. There's this trouble, this war that's happening, and, shows himself, to be a rather, upright man. So, David tries to get him drunk, and send him home, and he still won't go.

And, I think you may know, what happens next. David calls to Joab, and has Uriah, sent out on the front. And, and not only sent out on the front, where he perhaps might die, but sent out on the front, and soldiers commanded, to withdraw, so that he certainly, would, die.

And, when Nathan the prophet, is sent to David, by God, he calls what he did, murder. I think that James, intends for, his readers minds, to go there.

Right? For us to get there, and go, oh, it's altogether possible, to be God's man, put in a place of prominence, and to fail miserably, at this point.

[19:42] To have, the passions of, our hearts, cause, conflict. So, I think he's meaning to do that. I think he also is recalling, the teaching of his, half brother.

Right? The Lord, Jesus Christ. He's remembering what Jesus said, in the, sermon on the mount. Matthew chapter 5, verse 21, and following. You have heard, that it was said, to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders, will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you, that everyone who is angry, with his brother, will be liable, to judgment. So it's the, murder that exists, in our, hearts, that we will also be, judged for.

So whether an actual murder, or murder in our hearts, this is a serious, matter. James doesn't, want us to miss that. He's been building this case, for how, Christian people, ought to live together.

And he gets to this place, and he says, so what's causing all of this? It's your murderous hearts, that's what's causing it. You don't get what you want. So you take it.

[20:52] And you take it at the expense, of others. And beloved, hear me, we have all, been guilty of this, at some point. We all, before God, right now, would stand, before him, and be declared, murderers, on our own.

On our own merit, we would be sentenced, as murderers. This is why we need, the loving kindness, of our God, to show us, mercy, in the personal work, of Jesus Christ.

This is why we need, the imputed righteousness, of Christ, who never did this. Any anger, he experienced, was righteous anger. It was good. It was well aimed.

Ours, most of the time, is not. We need, Jesus's, righteousness, a good old phrase, I think that, Zach used it, last week, we need an, alien righteousness, right?

A righteousness that comes, from outside, of us. My voice snicker, every time, I say that. We need, an outside righteousness, that's granted to us, because, we, have, been, murderers.

[22:08] Right? We need, the penalty, for the sin, we've already committed, to be paid, for us. The infinite, penalty, to be bore, on our behalf.

So, our infinite Savior, bore it on the cross, for us, that we would be forgiven, of our murder, and we would be delivered, from the power, of our, fickle, and, oft, confused, hearts.

So, see this, cause and effects, transgression, that goes down. Your desire, you do not have, so you murder, you covet, and you cannot obtain, and so you fight, and you quarrel.

It shouldn't be so, amongst us. Note, finally, the prayerlessness, of conflict. It's the last part of verse 2, and on into verse 3.

You do not have, because, you do not ask. So, it would seem, that some, weren't asking at all. They weren't asking, for things, but some were asking.

[23:13] You ask, and you do not receive, because you ask, wrongly, to spend it, on your passions. It's a very, serious thing.

Very serious matter, that we understand, what the will of the Lord is. That we would know, both that we ought to ask, and that we ought to ask, rightly.

much of our asking, is aimed, at us. It's aimed, at, temporal joy. It's aimed, at things, that will never, really, satisfy.

C.S. Lewis, in, The Weight of Glory, wrote this. It would seem, that our Lord, finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak.

We are, half-hearted creatures, fooling about, with drink, and sex, and ambition, when infinite joy, is offered, us. Like an ignorant child, who wants to go on, making mud pies, in a slum, because he cannot, imagine, what is meant, by the offer, of a holiday, at the sea.

[24:28] We are far, too easily, pleased. So the temporal, passions of our heart, things aimed, at, temporal gain, respect, status, are asking, too little.

So, what ought, we ask for? We ought to ask, for the Lord, himself. We ought to ask, to spend it, that we might have, more, of Christ.

We ought to join, with Paul, Philippians 1, 21, for to me, to live, is Christ, and to die, is gain. Why? So that he would have, more, of Christ.

The Psalms are just, full of, the same teaching. Psalm 37, verse 4, delight yourself, in the Lord, and he will give you, the desires, of your heart.

Delight yourself, in, God, he will be, your desire, and guess what God, will grant you? Himself.

Psalm 34, in verse 8, oh, taste and see, that the Lord, is good.

[25:49] Blessed is the man, who takes refuge, in him. Psalm 16, in verse 11, you make known to me, the path of life. In your presence, there is fullness, of joy.

At your right hand, our pleasures, forevermore. Our greatest, our highest good, is found, in, God.

Most readily, in, Jesus Christ himself. Right? Because he's, been revealed to us. We can take up his word, and we can read, and we can understand, and we can find, the satisfaction, for our fickle, hearts.

So when we find, ourselves in conflict, we've forgotten this. We are looking, for something, to satisfy us, that will never, satisfy us, rather than, looking to God, who will, amply, provide, for all that we need.

What we have, whether it be, material possession, or some, of the other desires, I previously mentioned, status, respect, etc. These are to be spent, that we might gain, more of the greatest, possession.

[27:03] We ought not be, a people at war, with one another, because, wisdom from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits, impartial, and sincere, and a harvest, of righteousness, sown in peace, by those, who make, peace.

So set, your heart, this morning, on the goodness, of God to us, in Christ. I'll close, with a quote, from Jonathan Edwards, on a bullet, if you happen, to get a bulletin.

God is the highest, good, of the reasonable, creature. The enjoyment, of him, is our proper, and is the only, happiness, with which our souls, can be satisfied.

Let's pray together.