|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Wrestling With The World |
| Reference | James 4: 1-10 |
| Date | 08 May 2016 |
| Speaker | Mr Adams |

Even at a very young age you are in contact with the world and the values and pleasures, the desires of the world and even at a young age we began to try to cloak our desires in godly terms and it seems like even at a young age we began to start wrestling with the world.

The first five verses of chapter 4 tell us that we are facing a struggle. As we wrestle with the world we are in a struggle.

What is that struggle? What are its causes? What are it results?

The next five verses tells us about way to victory in this wrestling match that we have with the world and we will see that the way to victory is through God’s grace when we respond appropriately to God’s grace.

Our text this morning begins with a question.

4:1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Some translations are a little bit more graphic and really more literal to the original (From whence come wars and fightings among you?)

Now this word usually does mean a literal political physical armed combat. It can also be used symbolically and more than likely James is using this symbolically here rather than an actual armed conflict but he has chosen a very strong word to emphasize how serious the quarrels and the fightings are that are going on. The two different words he uses is:

1. **Wars**, it is like something that is continuing, a feud that does not end, disputes that just keep on going.
2. Second word would be more like a **battle;** just a sudden flare-up and then it might be over.

Nevertheless whether it is just a flare-up and a terrible coming to blows or if it is a long seeding thing just never comes to resolution, he is asking us this question? What is the cause, where does this come from and he asks where are these quarrels coming from that are among you. It could be applied to everybody because when we look at the answer we see this is really true of all human conditions, all human conflicts whether interpersonal or international conflicts. The answer he gives will apply, but in our context of James he is specifically talking to people like you and me, people who are either Christians or if there are not Christians, they are family members or friends of Christians, those are somewhat at least interested in Christian message. Before we look at the answer that James gives; each one of us should ask ourselves that question. Think back to the most recent quarrel that we had, what caused that. May be there is some dispute or feud, ongoing conflict that we are currently involved in. It is being going on while it is not been resolved, what is the cause of that. Are we in an ongoing quarrel, struggle with somebody, what are their causes. Usually when we ask a question like that we are very quick to point the finger. In the Garden of Eden it is easy to shift the blame.

This is the answer that the scripture gives us.

*Is it not this, that your passions (lusts) are at war within you?*

*(Isn't it because you are full of selfish desires that fight to control you?)*

Well it is easy to blame other people; the scripture wants us to look at ourselves, our problems, our situation, problems within us. Do we have self-centeredness, arrogance and pride that is leading us into these conflicts. Is it our desire to control, our desire to get our way, our desire to push our agenda through, and our desire to get what we want. One of the most famous quotes from US Military history was from the war of 1812 and Commodore Oliver Perry said,

*“We have met the enemy and they are ours.”*

Walt Kelly, a comedian/comic writer, changed that quote to

*“We have met the enemy and he is us.”*

That is what James is trying to tell us. It is easy to blame other but we are our own enemies.

So when the scripture says, what is causing the quarrel?

Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

(Isn't it because you are full of selfish desires that fight to control you?)

Which particular passions are lusts, which particular selfish desires and it is interesting he does not identify any specifically and I think possibly he felt that open ended because if he listed two or three we would be tentative to say, “Ah! that is not me” and then there would be some others that we would be guilty of. So what passions and selfish desires are roaring within us.

4:2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

We see here that this problem of selfish desire starts to escalate and we are never satisfied. These cravings, these lusts, passions that you may be just recently identified as I ask you that question could possibly include some things like the insatiable desire for wealth, for money or business opportunities. It could include the insatiable desire for power, influence, prestige, respect, possibly the desire to be involved in some illicit sexual relationship, possibly the desire just to always be right and always push your way through, possibly a desire just for security or acceptance, fame, popularity.

The thing that is roaring within us is going to keep going and compound and get worse and we are going to find out it still does not bring fulfillment. Even if we get what we think we want usually we still end up somewhat empty. There is still something lacking, we still want more. John D Rockefeller, a very rich man couple of centuries ago in the US was one time asked how much money do you need to have enough? His answer was “just a little bit more”. This craving is never satisfied, always has to be something else and so here in this text James is saying, when you do not get what you want or if you don’t receive satisfaction from what you want then it bills to anger and resentment and you forcefully try to get what you want and you might even murder.

Matthew 5:21

**21** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'

**22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

When you have anger against your brother, when you insult your brother, when you call your brother horrible names it is like character assassination. What weapons do we use in our quarrels? Do we assassinate character, are we insulting people, are we doing something that in the term of Jesus application here could really be called murderer in a sense that we are assassinating somebody’s character.

4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

(Even when you do pray, your prayers are not answered, because you pray just for selfish reasons.)

We ask but our motives are wrong, we want to spend or use on your own passion, your own lust, and our own selfish desires. If we think about our prayers for a moment, are our prayers with wrong motives, are our prayers so that we will have something for our own desires or are they really for God’s glory. Frequently, when Christians pray at the end of their prayer they will say the phrase in Jesus name we pray, Amen. But if we really mean in Jesus name it would be in accordance with Jesus character, in accordance with His will. We need to be careful because our heart can be deceiving us.

Jeremiah 17:

**9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

**10** “I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, … ”

We think when we pray that this is God’s will, but it is really my will but the Lord does search the heart, the lord does test the mind, the Lord does know.

Some Christians misuse the scripture.

Psalm 37:

**4** delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

So then people think that if I go to church, if I read my bible, if I do this and this and this then I can get God to do what I want him to do. No, if we delight ourselves in the Lord, God is going to change your heart. If we delight ourselves in the heart, he is going to change your desires and you will desire His will, you will desire what He wants and then you will not be asking with wrong motives, but if we see prayer as a way to try to manipulate God to give us what we want we are no different than most of the other world religions. So when in the Lord’s prayer before we get to the part, ‘give us this day our daily bread and we express our needs and our desires’ the first half of the prayer deals with God, ‘Our father in heaven, sovereign Lord, hallowed be His name’, our emphasis is on the glory, the majesty of God and then it continues ‘your will be done, your kingdom come, your rule on earth, your rule in my life, your will in my life be done and after we get through that part of the prayer then we are in a position to bring our requests to God.

We might be praying something that is in the will of God but yet God has not yet answered that at this time or may be God has another plan you are not aware of that will be better. So don’t just automatically assume any unanswered prayer is a result of my passions that are out of line with God but the text is saying that is one big reason for unanswered prayer, our motives are wrong. In this text we see there is a broken relationship with people, we quarrel, we fight and we even murder or at least symbolically or trying to destroy them with our words and the relationship with God is broken and that we try to misuse prayer, we pray that my will be done rather than thy will be done and so the relationship with God is broken and when we get to verse 4 then we get really to heart of the matter. As James says,

4:4 You adulterers and adulteresses! 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.

That is pretty harsh and pretty shocking language. James here is trying to get across a point, you are unfaithful people. In the Old Testament God called people adulterer and adulteress because they have violated the covenant. Prophet Hosea had a wife who was unfaithful to him on numerous occasions and God used that as an object lesson and said that is the way my people are to me. In the Old Testament we see examples where the people would still try to worship God but then they would also worship idols and there came times even they would go into the temple but then just outside the temple there might be an altar to the god Baal. The prophet says you are adulterer and adulteress as you have been unfaithful to God; you are not living according to the vows that have been made to God. The New Testament has similar terminology where Christ is the groom we the church are His bride and if we are unfaithful to Christ then we like these people that James is writing to are adulterers. We are trying to go in two opposing directions or as in the words of Jesus, we are trying to serve two masters and we cannot serve two masters. Earlier in the Book of James chapter 1 we heard him talking about people that were double minded with divided loyalties. Here there is a major heart problem.

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

We have some responsibility in that. We have come to God, we want God to take our life, but yet we also try to follow other direction and we become what scripture calls a friend of the world. New Testament world has different meanings, just like in the English language one word can have more than one meaning depending on the context. We see in John 3:

God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

People love the world in a sacrificial way to want them to come to faith in Christ. But here James is talking about society that is organized without any reference to almighty God. It is a social value system that is alien to the kingdom values of the kingdom of God. It is an amoral, immoral secular materialistic society and culture. Many of the things that we see around us that we might not even think are sinful but it turns out that the more we get entangled with things of the world the less interest that we sometimes have for things of God.

So James is saying that if you are a friend of the world you are an enemy with God. You cannot have both, you are not going to be a loyal servant of God and also be a friend of the world. There is a clear-cut choice here. James is using strong words here. We have already mentioned adulterer, the other word that he use has political connotations, enemy, you are at war with God. So we are unfaithful to God and it is like we are at war with God. The ironic thing is that when we first come to faith in Christ we are reconciled with God. The scripture talks about the peace that we now can have with God but because we then allow sin to come in our life and because we then try to serve another master, one again we become enemies with God.

4:5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, ‘The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?’

OR

‘The spirit in man turns toward envious desires.’

OR

‘He yearns jealously over the spirit which He has made to dwell in us.’

This verse is a transitional verse and if we take the first two possibilities, it is basically a conclusion of what we have just said. The spirit that is in us is turning towards envious desires, our natural self, the terminology Paul would use would be the flesh, the old man, the old nature is yearning for these evil desires. If we take the other possibility, God is yearning for us that then transition us into the next section where we see God is going to give us his grace.

So before we continue to the next part we have been talking about the struggle that comes in wrestling with the world and we have seen the causes of this trouble that comes from our impure motives, the selfish desires that are roaring within us. It comes because we are not totally committed or submitted to God, we are friends of the world and we have also seen the results of the struggle which would include the inner strive, the roaring that is going on within us that leads to discontent and anger and then result in broken relationships with our fellow man as we quarrel and fight and that leads to a broken relationship with God because we are unfaithful to him. We become his enemy because we are now friends with the world.

**The way to victory and the response that God wants us to make**.

Now the solutions to the trouble we have just seen is God. The solution is His grace.

4:6 But He (God) gives more grace.

We are dependent on God. We are dependent on His grace. It is not that I am just going to try harder to control over my passions or try harder than I had quite so many selfish desires or if have these selfish desires I am going to try just a little bit harder to not come to blows over it. Yes, there will be some effort but ultimately the only way we can win out or receive victory in this wrestling with the world and wrestling with Satan that we are involved in is through God and the grace that He gives. Grace by definition is undeserved, it is unmerited. It is something we cannot earn, it is a not a reward that we get for being good little Christians. It is not a result of our religious rituals.

The verse continues

Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

We are dependent on God and his grace but we receive it when we are humble. If we are proud, self-centred, arrogant we are not going to be recipients of God’s grace. If we are self-sufficient and think we can achieve everything we need in the life through our own strength; we are not going to receive God’s grace.

We all think that we are pretty good person and we compare ourselves to somebody that is worse in our eyes and we feel good but we end up being like the Pharisee who was really a pretty good person in that parable that Jesus told when a Pharisee went a temple to pray and also a despised sinful tax collector went. Pharisee compared himself with that tax collector and he did not receive God’s grace. If we are going to receive God’s grace then we come to him humble. Jesus said in Sermon on Mount, Blessed are the poor in spirit. Meaning those who realize there need for God. If they cannot come to God on their own merit, blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those are humble are those who bow their knee submitting before God in all aspects of life rather than going to do things their own way.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.

God gives grace but we receive God’s grace when we humbly submit ourselves to him. In the scripture almost always when we see God extending his grace we also see that he expects a response and unfortunately in some of the teaching in the church today the response that God wants us to make is negated because they went into stress so much that it is God and it is God’s grace, both are true. We do not need to just choose one or the other. Many times heresies, false teaching that come into the church what they teach is true but it is not the whole truth. For example, one of the earliest heresies that the early Christians fought about was over who Jesus is. One group of people said Jesus is divine and they denied that He was in flesh. Another heretical group took the opinion Jesus was a man but they denied the divinity of Christ. So both groups had the truth but only part of the truth and when we look at James here we can see how things fit together. Yes God is sovereign, He is in-charge of the world, yes salvation comes only through grace through what God does, we cannot earn it, it is not by works, nothing we do will earn us salvation but if we emphasize only those things which some camps in the church today do we are deemphasizing you are missing out on so much other rest of scripture. For over and over and over it is repeated in scripture that we are to respond to God in repentance, respond to His grace in faith. In the Old Testament Joshua tells the people you got a clear-cut choice, choose you this day whom you will serve. John the Baptist told the people, you need to repent and bring forth works that show you have repented. Jesus himself said the kingdom of God is at hand, the grace of God is come near to you therefore repent and believe the gospel. One time when Jesus was looking over Jerusalem he was weeping and he said, “O Jerusalem I would have gathered you as a mother hen will gather its chick but you would not”. They choose not to, they did not respond in faith. So here we see a balance in James. Sometimes people might have an experience where just seems like the grace of God is just washing all over them, but God’s grace can be resisted.

God does give grace to those who humbly submit themselves before God, bowing their knee before him, acknowledging him as the lord.

The way God showed his grace the most. The most full expression of God’s grace is what He did through Jesus Christ. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. God so loved the world that He gave his own son that all who believe in him can have eternal life. Christ died for our sin according to the scripture. Christ died for our offences and He was raised for our justification that is where we see the grace of God most clearly and that is the grace of God we look to respond to in faith.

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Sometimes we tend to twist those around rather than resisting to devil we sometime resist to God. Sometimes it is easier for us to resist God than it is to resist the devil. God gives His grace, he is not going to force us to follow him and accept His grace, we can resist him but we are encouraged here, when God gives His grace that we do submit ourselves to him, do not resist him but rather resist the devil.

When we realize that to whom we belong, God or this world, then if we submit to God He will give grace and then we can resist the temptation. God enables us to choose correctly but there is always conscious submitting to God and resisting the devil. Jesus resisted temptation by quoting scripture. We resist devil by saying ‘No’ based on what the scripture says. In Ephesians we also had some help on how to resist the devil,

Ephesians 6:10

**10** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

**11** Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

The armor of God is salvation, it is righteousness, it is truth, it is the word of God, it is the preparation to share the gospel, its faith and all covered with prayer.

James 4:

**7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

**8** Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

Draw through prayer, through scripture, through worship, by submitting yourself to God and saying no to the devil. In the Old Testament we see the symbol that you could only get so close to the presence of God and you could go no further. In the temple there was a veil that separated the Holy place where the presence of God was and nobody could get back there except the high priest once a year. At Easter that veil was ripped in two and now access into the presence of God is possible.

Hebrews 10:

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

22 **let us draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Jesus is that veil and we can get through that veil and go through Jesus and draw near to the presence of God. Imagine we draw near to God and then God will draw near to us.

James 4:8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

We need to clean up our live the way we lived and he gets to the heart of it with purify your heart. Our hearts need to be changed. So ask yourself in cleansing your hand what are some things that need to be cleaned and utilized. What sins do you need to repent of? Look at your heart what are the impure motives, thoughts, desires that you might have that need to be purified.

**9** Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

We come near to God, we confess our sin, we let him change our heart and we truly feel this heart felt sorry for sin.

**10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.

If we look at church history most of the great revivals that outpour in the God’s spirit throughout history in the church was when people actually did confront the reality and the seriousness of their sin and there was this heartfelt turning in repentance towards God. Unfortunately, in lot of our worship services we do not really have a place for that. We want something that is upbeat and exciting and on the one hand yeah we want to be uplifted when we come to church but yet the true way to be lifted up in our worship is what we see in verse 10.

**CONCLUSIONS**:

Our struggles with the world are caused by our impure motives, our selfish desires, our friendship with the world and the results of our inner life is a mess, our relationships are a mess and our relationship with God is broken. The only way that we can receive any help on this is through God’s grace and we respond to him in repentance.

When we first come to Jesus this is how you need to come, repentance in faith. As a Christian and you have been walking with Christ for a while, when sin comes in to your life, when you realize you are wrestling with the world we need again to repent, in faith submit ourselves to God.