

Sermon Draft

Text: James 3:13–4:10

Sermon: “War and Peace”

James Epistle has been called “The Proverbs of the New Testament.” Just in our text this morning we have several examples:

James 3:16: For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

4:4: Friendship with the world is enmity with God.

4:7: Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

4:10: Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Now we could tear these from context and use them as mantras, or positive affirmations to get us through the day. But this would not be the idea of Scripture itself. To begin to understand Scripture, we need to ask how that verse fits with the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, James 3:16, ***“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice,”*** must be brought to light through John 3:16, where we understand that Jesus came to take into his body every jealousy and selfish ambition, so as to bring truth and peace to us in his forgiving love from the cross. In James 4:7 we are told to: ***“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*** It is spiritually dangerous when we think we can resist the devil by our own strength and not by the strength of Jesus’ blood and righteousness and the new identity these gave us in our Baptism?

So, it is with all proverbs of the entire Scriptures.

James is a practical book useful for our daily journeys. The portion of James which forms the basis of today’s message focuses on sin’s war and God’s peace. As always Christ is the resolution. James wants us to see that the war of our passions within is so destructive to us and to those around us that only God’s grace in Christ can win a harvest of peace.

There is a war within our hearts within ourselves that is the result of our sinful nature we inherited. James talks this war only after he exhorts us to wisdom, that we ***“show [our] works in the meekness of wisdom”*** (3:13). The world and our sinful flesh are not with the program.

As long as we are in our mortal bodies, the devil enlists our thoughts, urges, and body parts to sin. We learned last week what harm the tongue can cause or the ears listening to gossip to be recorded for later broadcast. The eye may be covetous or lustful for flashy desires or fleshly ones. The hand may slap or steal.

Here James agrees with Paul, who says (Romans 7:15), ***“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”*** ***So the disorder and vile practice are at war within us. And James is clear: it is “earthly, unspiritual, demonic”*** (3:15).

The devil does not enlist our sinful flesh only to bring us inner mayhem. A calculating fallen angel, he looks for a kind of harvest of his own.

James says, ***“a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”*** (3:18), the devil considers that a harvest of strife can be sown out of the jealousy and selfish ambition that struggle within and against us.

As James shows, the purpose of the tempter is not only to wreak havoc inside us but also to have it work out in the open. The devil means for the war within to wound and kill the whole Church, mass casualties us and others:

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?” (4:1).

Yes, there’s a war going on inside each of us, but God refuses to lose it. That is to say, he refuses to lose you. It is interesting the way our text says it: ***“The Scripture says, [God] yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”*** (4:5).

Yes, God is a jealous God. We teach our children not to be jealous. Usually when we say “jealous,” we’re talking about sin. A jealous boyfriend, for instance, may be someone to get away from, lest he become an abusive, controlling husband. Jealous people around us may act vindictively and be unkind.

But if there is anyone, we want to be jealous over us, it is God. For him to be jealous is to say he wants us to himself, and he wants no one else to have us not a false god or false idol, not false doctrine, false hope, or the devil himself ever to have you. He says in giving the First Commandment, ***“For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments”*** (Exodus 20:5–6). Only God can be this kind of good jealous, jealous without sin. And we praise him that he is.

Jealousy, in most cases, means that the jealous person does harm to another, because keeping us is all for his benefit. But God’s jealousy is a protective jealousy. A guardian jealousy. An exclusive on loving us with a perfect love, with no exception to treating us kindly. And that is for our benefit. This is why James, talking about God’s merciful and holy jealousy, puts it in the terms of grace: ***“But he gives more grace. . . . God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”*** (4:6). Would that all jealous people did the same!

We, humbled by our sins, are seen by our God who wants us only for himself, and he, without hesitation, gives us more grace, so as to strengthen the relationship.

In the end, God's jealousy triumphs and does put the competition out of our misery. The devil will certainly accuse us before God. Yet each day, God's previous giving of more grace brings us again in gratitude to our knees, submitting before God each night at bedside, and resisting the devil through a faith which knows only Christ's forgiveness the crucial and final battle stand.

Each day our forgiving Lord calls us to go to those against whom we have sinned and seek to be reconciled, and the devil's chaos gives way to God's order. Forgiveness is, simply put, God's wonderful way of neutralizing the devil's claims against us and having him flee from us. One day, the devil will, at Jesus' command, be assigned permanently to his place, the place prepared for him and his angels, the place of eternal torment, hell, and he will be gone from us forever.

All of this is the harvest of God's grace, primarily experienced in worship, then through the intervening days until the next Lord's Day. ***"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you"*** (4:8a). While this is always true in the relationship of God-given faith, it is especially true on Sunday at church. Here Jesus' baptismal promise of being with you always is enlivened as we gather. Here his written Word and he, the incarnate Word, are one in the preaching. Here we eat and drink, receiving him at the altar, and we live.

"Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (4:8b). This echoes Psalm 24: ***"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully"*** (Psalm 24:3–4). Yes, James is using Bible words about the corporate worship of God's people. That "holy hill" would be the temple mount, and there was church each week for God's people.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6), said, ***"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep"*** (Luke 6:25).

The implication was, ***“Better to mourn and weep now, and live as God’s people, than not to repent, only to mourn and weep when you hear the verdict on the Last Day.”***

But the crowning words, James 4:10, tell us what God-given faith and Holy Spirit-led repentance do: They make us humble before the Lord. ***“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”*** This is a verse of humility and God’s blessing. And it comes full circle back to the meekness of wisdom where we started our reading today and the peace whereby there is a harvest of peace for those who sow in peace.

God has a wonderful way of dealing with the war within, the war fed and funded by Satan. In this war, we have no peace, no hope and never will apart from a peace which the world cannot give. God has given us the grace of sins forgiven and the privilege of sowing in peace. In him, we may live out all that happens this coming week with the meekness of wisdom. We who may have been brash in our sinning have now been humbled before God. God has seen to it.

And because he is a God who gives more grace, we are filled with living hope, able to withstand Satan's schemes and live in the joy of salvation. It is his pleasure to exalt us raising us up to worship and serve, loving him and our neighbor.

The war with sin must bow to God's victory, and the passions fighting within us are overtaken with the peace which shall be sown according to his will and reaped in his good pleasure.

Amen