

THE WAR TO END ALL WARS

(James 4:1-10)

INTRODUCTION:

World War II had ended. On September 2, 1945 General Douglas MacArthur spoke to a waiting world from the Battleship Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay, "Today the guns are silent...the skies no longer rain death...the seas bear only commerce...men everywhere walk upright in the sunlight. The entire world is quietly at peace...."

That long war cost sixty million lives, and an estimated \$1 trillion. It came only one generation after what President Woodrow Wilson called "the war to end all wars." Since World War II we have been engaged in Korea and Viet Nam, Iraq twice, not to speak of limited wars, political assassinations, personal revolts, rebellions and social revolutions.

The history of the world is a history of war.

But James brings the picture of war down to a more personal level. He speaks of wars and fights among individuals. Remember he is writing to Christians, to the church. Could there be wars and fighting between Christians, within the church? Yes, sadly, it is not only possible, it is probable.

What is the root problem of wars and fights? Better yet what is the strategy for victory? This is what God's Word will reveal to us this morning.

THE REASONS FOR OUR WARFARE – BEING A HEDONIST

James begins by asking, "**Where do wars and fights come from among you?**" Then he answers, "**Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?**"

The root problem we have is that we all have an inner warfare going on within our hearts. Our problems we have with other people is a problem we have within ourselves. James tells us that our fighting and quarreling is a result of our "**desires for pleasure that war in your members.**" (4:1)

Because we have such a strong desire to fulfill our pleasures, when someone gets in the way of our fulfilling those desires there becomes the potential for war. When something stops you in your route toward fulfillment, the natural tendency is for you to fight until you get your way.

James puts it rather bluntly in verse 2.

(James 4:2 NKJV) You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

This is a rather ugly picture of the human heart. Is James the only New Testament writer that teaches that our natural disposition is governed by our lust for pleasure? No, listen to the Apostle Paul's description of our natural self in Titus 3:3

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

Our natural internal motivation is a desire for personal pleasure. The word 'pleasure' is the word *hedone*, with the connotation of sinful, self-indulgent pleasure. This is the Greek word from which the word "hedonism" comes. In philosophy Hedonism is the belief that the highest good in life is pleasure, or the fulfillment of pleasure.

We live in an age where Hedonism is the ruling philosophy of life. Our slogans, "Grab all the gusto", "I want it all and I want it now" are hedonistic slogans and they describe our culture. If you don't believe that our culture is based on hedonism just look at our current financial crisis. It is a crisis caused by greed – greed of wall street, greed of the banking industry, greed of the homeowners who wanted more than they could pay for, greed of the politicians who are on the take from lobbyists rather than doing their job of oversight.

James says that a life built on this philosophy will end up with a life of conflict and war. Again in verse 2: **"You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war."**

When James says here that you Christians murder I don't believe he means that you literally wind up killing others. But he is most likely drawing again on the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus equated being angry toward someone with committing murder in your heart. Jesus taught that you can murder someone with your lips. You murder with your thoughts. You think thoughts of murder when your desires are frustrated and held back and you don't get your way.

It is like a little baby who when they get what they want they are very happy. But the moment you take that toy away, or the moment you don't

have a bottle ready--watch out!! They can shake and turn red and belt out a deafening scream.

Christians sometimes have adopted a sort of baptized hedonism that even affects our prayer life. **Verse 3: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”** Too many of us today may pray like this prayer of this person.

Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my bank account to keep
I pray my stocks are on the rise
and that my analyst is wise.
That all the wine I sip is white.
That my hot-tub stays water tight.
That my racquetball won't get too tough.
That all my sushi's fresh enough.
I pray my cordless phone will work
and that my job won't lose it's perks.
That my microwave won't radiate
and my condo won't depreciate.
I pray my health club doesn't close
And that my money market grows.
If I go broke before I wake.
I pray my Volvo they won't take.
Lord lets do lunch, I don't know when.
I guess that's all for now, Amen.

The problem is that most of us are unaware that the inner battle in our souls is the true source of our outer conflicts. We want to think that it is always the other person who is at fault. There wouldn't be any conflict if the other party would just get their act together!

GOD TAKES OUR WARFARE SERIOUSLY, SO SHOULD WE

We excuse ourselves without thinking that there is something wrong within us. We don't think about overcoming this natural tendency to be at war with ourselves and with others. But God looks at it differently for the Christian. He has a different perspective, which James brings out in verse 4:

(James 4:4 NKJV) Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James calls this type of Christian an ‘adulterer and enemy of God!’ This is strong language. What is he getting at? He is saying that when we are in pursuit of the world’s goal, we are an enemy of God and a spiritual adulterer. In other words we are worldly, not godly!

Worldliness is not merely doing something someone says you shouldn't do. It's not just adhering to the slogan, "I don't drink, smoke, or chew or run around with girls that do." Basically worldliness is adopting the philosophy of the world and living by it. It's adopting the philosophy of life that says that your personal pleasure is the highest good and primary pursuit in your life.

The noun “friendship” comes from the verb *phileo* meaning “to love, or to have affection for.” It can also mean, “to kiss” as an indication of affection. No loving husband is willing to have his wife kissing and making illicit love with another man. Neither does God want his children to love the world, to kiss the world, to have affection for the world rather than for Him.

The apostle John gives the same warning as James in 1 John 2:15-16, **“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world.”** A conscious choice of living like the world is a rejection of God and James calls it ‘adultery.’

God reacts with holy jealousy when you become a follower of the world more than a follower of God. He is a jealous God. At Mt. Sinai He said, **“You shall have no other gods before me.... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.... Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold”** (Ex. 20:3, 5, 23).

God says that choosing a worldly life-style, a life built on having the highest goal as fulfillment of your pleasure is a serious problem. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God.

GOD PROMISES US VICTORY

Since we all have this natural pull towards the world rather than towards God is there any hope of overcoming? Yes, there is. There is abundant hope and that hope rests in the grace of God.

(James 4:5-6 NKJV) Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? {6} But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

The Spirit of God, who dwells in us, yearns for our loyal devotion. And He is able to give us overcoming power to win the war in our hearts. God gives us his grace, but we are to humble ourselves. We are to be willing to yield to the Spirit's yearnings in our life.

Overcoming the desire to be like the world is not easy, but it is possible. The war with worldliness is winnable! James builds on the idea of humility presented in v. 6 and closes with the same thought in v. 10 - "**Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**" In between are a series of commands that assures victory.

1 - "**Submit yourselves, then, to God.**" (7) This is a voluntary act of placing yourself under God's authority. This is what happens when we really pray "**Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" Submit means much more than a passive acquiescence. It carries the idea of "signing up" for service. It is a pledge of allegiance to a great Sovereign so that you can fight under his banner.

2- "**Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.**" This is the other side of the same coin. You submit to God by resisting the devil and you resist the devil by submitting to God. Satan constantly seeks to lead people into self-centered and world-centered attitudes and activities. He wants to subvert our allegiance to God.

We have a secured victory. but we must actively oppose God's enemy. Indecision and doubt only makes him bold and aggressive in his attacks, but he flees like a coward when we confront him with a resolute will and firm confidence in God.

Three steps for submitting to God and for resisting the devil are presented in verses 8 and 9.

1. "**Wash your hands, you sinners.**" This is an appeal to our outward lifestyle. Our hands represent our deeds. They must be cleansed as we withdraw them from evil deeds and from grasping for the world's contaminating pleasures. Our conduct must be clean.

2. "**Purify your hearts, you double-minded.**" Here is another reference to our motives. Our hearts become impure when we love the wrong things and give our allegiance to the wrong people on the throne or our heart. The heart is the place of our affections. Jesus must be Lord of our hearts or we are double-minded.

3. **“Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.”** This is an obvious call for repentance. We must not only acknowledge the existence of our sins, but we must feel sorry that we have sinned against God. James’ was no killjoy, but he recognized that laughter in the Old Testament was often the scornful laughter of the fool who refused to take sin seriously. We quickly become too casual about sin.

The story is told of a famous rabbi who was walking with some of his disciples when one of them asked, "Rabbi, when should a man repent?" The rabbi calmly replied, "You should be sure you repent on the last day of your life." "But," protested several of his disciples, "we can never be sure which day will be the last day of our life." The famous rabbi smiled and said, "The answer to that problem is very simple. Repent now."

We cannot play games with the devil and with sin. We win the war with worldliness by humbling ourselves in the sight of God, drawing near to Him, being decisive about resisting the devil through repentance and maintaining a pure heart.

CONCLUSION:

The Good News is that God will give grace to the humble. If you will turn from your self sufficiency and humble yourself before God He promises here to give you His Grace. He will LIFT YOU UP. God will do for you what you cannot do for yourself and charge you nothing for it.

The war that James has been talking about is one that can be won. The war to end all wars is the war raging within you, the war against being motivated by the world. If you win that war, then all other wars will cease.

Amen? Amen!