

Who Will You Follow?

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James 4:1-12

Eric Liddell, a Scottish man, was a very fast man. In fact, he set a British record for the fastest man in the 100-meter dash. He passed on the 100-meter dash, his best event, in the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris. Why? Because the heats were held on a Sunday. Liddell could have very well won a gold medal. He gave up all that fame and a gold medal? The world would say: what a tragedy.

Jim Elliot was a man who in 1956 decided that he wanted to take the gospel to a group of people called the Aucas. Leaving his family at home, he left with a group of men. Within days of making camp within miles of the Aucas, these people attacked him and killed Jim along with all the men with him. He left his wife and daughter to be killed for Jesus? Again, the world would say: what a tragedy.

C.T Studd, a British man born in 1860, was called to be a missionary to China, India and Africa. When he was 25 years of age and while he was a missionary in china, he received a large sum of money as an inheritance from his wealthy father. Instead of spending all that money on all the pleasures this world has to offer, he chose to give all this money to the work of the Lord. The world would say: what a tragedy.

The world says tragedy to all these men. But what if the real tragedy is found when we forfeit what is much greater than all this world has to offer? The truths of this passage have transformed my life. The question is this? Who will you follow? Will you follow the world or will you follow Jesus?

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.

You adulterous people! 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. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law,

you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

- James 4:1-12

Two weeks ago, Pastor John discuss the previous section of scripture in James, which the passage today flows from. In this passage just like the previous passage, James puts two things up against each other. In the passage before, it is worldly wisdom verse godly wisdom. In this passage, it is friendship with the world verse friendship with God. We are not going to spend much time there, but verses 11-12 talk about how are speech can either be worldly or from God. Verses 1-3 is what it looks like to be a friend of the world, and verses 5-10 is what it looks like to be a friend of God. Let's dive in:

Friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God

A couple of things to keep in mind with this passage. The world in this passage “cosmos” is not referring to the physical world, but a spiritual reality. A commentator said this: “It is man-centered and Satan-directed.” The goal of the world is “self-glory, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, self-satisfaction, and every other form of self-serving.” This friendship with the world is an “all about me” mentality. “Friendship with the world” carries with it the idea of a close intimate relationship. Friendship with the world leads to:

1. Sin against others
2. Sin within ourselves
3. Sin against God

1. Sin against others

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

- James 4:1

James opens up this section of Scripture with a question to his readers. What is causing them to fight and argue? James says the reason is themselves. How quick are we to blame others for our sins? When in fact as James has so often reminded us in this book, the sin comes from ourselves.

James says conflict comes from our “passions within us.” Other translations say your “pleasures.” The Greek word used here is “hedonon,” which is where we get the word hedonism. Hedonism, is following the desire to fulfill every passion and whim that promises satisfaction and enjoyment. These are the type of people that Paul describes in 2 Timothy 3:2-4, as “lovers of self,” or “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”

It is clear that at our core, we are sinful people. We were born sinful people. When you place people together, all have sinful/selfish desires fights and quarrels ensue. You don’t have to look any further than our marriage relationships. Sarah and I have a great marriage, but that doesn’t mean we never fight and have quarrels. Quite frankly, the majority of our arguments are over stupid and unimportant stuff. Do we really have to watch one more season of The Voice? Why? Because we are two sinners with selfish passions within us.

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

- James 4:2a

Now do I actually think there was murder going on in the church. I do not, but I believe this is an attempt of James to show his readers what our sinful desires can lead to and how dangerous they are. As these sinful desires begin to control us, we will not stop at anything to get them.

When our desires are not met, we then lash out in anger and can ultimately lead to murder. Sin starts out by what we think is small and no big deal. But it is a huge deal. One sin is an affront against God and separates us from Him forever. One sin grows in us. Ted Bundy is an example of this. It is dangerous and leads us down a road far from God.

2. Sin in ourselves

Following the world results in sin in ourselves.

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.

- James 4:2b-3

Some people are so selfish in the church that they don't even ask God for things. They reveal their selfish hearts in a prayer-less life, saying that they don't need God and can make it own their own.

Some people pray but are even selfish in their prayers. They don't want God. They want God's gifts but not God himself. The way this looks is that maybe they want healing or peace or joy.

STOP: Sometimes this whole following after the world thing can seem kinda vague. How do we even know if we are followers of the world? One way is to look at your prayer life. Your prayer life says a lot about you. Your prayer could tell you a lot about where your passions lie. The world or God. Do you pray? There really are a lot of things I admire about John, but one thing that's stands at the top is his prayer life. He truly acknowledges his dependence upon God even in the little things. When we don't pray, we are saying we don't need God. Maybe you pray and your prayers are selfish. You pray but are asking things according to your will and not His? You are sinning by seeking worldly pleasures. They want to seek pleasure not in God, but of the things of this world. When you pray do you want God or His gifts? Health for you and your kids? Successful job, peace, joy. Do want these things more or over God? Do you want a heaven without God?

It is clear in this verse that we are self-centered people who desire things for our well-being. It is not only selfish, but worldly. We desire the things of this world above all.

3. Sin against God

When we seek the world, we sin against God.

You adulterous people! 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.

- James 4:4

James describes being friends of the world as “adultery” against God. It might seem odd that James describes our rebellion against God as adultery. But it is actually very fitting. This is obviously not about sexual, but spiritual infidelity. Throughout Scripture, we see God’s relationship with his people described like a marriage. When his people rebel, he often describes this rebellion as adultery. God says to his people:

As a woman may betray her lover, so you have betrayed me, house of Israel. One way we clearly see this is in the book of Hosea.

- Jeremiah 3:20

James is telling us that - as believers - the more we follow after the things of this world, we are committing adultery against God by cheating and sinning against him.

Why do we choose friendship with the world over friendship with God? We believe it will give us pleasure and happiness. Battling unbelief is the root of every sin. Will we believe the empty promises of the world or the eternal promises of God?

How are we friends with the world? Sometimes these things are obvious. Maybe we seek the pleasures of alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography, gossip, etc. Other times it can be things that are good things, but we seek them more than God. Relationships, money, work, sports, etc. These things are not bad, but when we seek them over God, if we try to find our pleasure and happiness in them rather than God, we are becoming friends with the world. As we will see, these things cannot satisfy.

What does it look like?

- * Maybe it looks similar to Eric Liddell, and we are to give up some of our extracurricular activities because it conflicts with our relationship with God.
- * Maybe our kids’ extracurricular activities conflicts with their relationship with God.
- * Maybe it looks similar to Jim Elliot and God is calling us to tell someone about Jesus, and it might be difficult. No, it probably won’t cost you your life like it did his, but it could be fearful and cause you to step out of your comfort zone to tell your friend or coworker about Jesus.
- * Maybe it looks similar to C.T. Studd and God is calling you to give more of your resources or time to Him.
- * Maybe it is a particular sin that you struggle with and just don’t fight. Pride, lust, bitterness, anger, worry, arguing with your parents. We continually fall into these because we believe these sins are more satisfying than God.

Even in our sin and rebellion, there is much grace

Even though there is worldly desires in all of us as all of us struggle with the affections of this world, there is hope. That hope is the Grace of God. Guys, there is grace. Even when we follow after the world, the Father is there to give us his grace.

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

- James 4:5

There is some debate of the meaning of this verse. The way I see this passage though is this. Our God is a jealous God, who longs for his children. God is a jealous God? Sounds a little weird, but it is actually a good thing that God is a jealous God. In fact, it is a gracious thing. God loves us too much for us to let us settle for the things of this world. He longs for his children to come back to Him. He wants it so bad that he sent his son to die for us so that we could receive his grace to resist the things of this world.

Let me give you a way that this makes sense. As we have seen, God likes to use the analogy of marriage when it comes to his relationship with his people. There should be a jealousy of a husband and wife towards their spouse. It is a good thing that I am a jealous husband of Sarah. Meaning, I am jealous for the affections of my wife. I do not want Sarah to have affections for any other person. I don't want to wake up in the morning to Sarah meeting our neighbor on the front porch for coffee. No, I want all the affections of my wife. In the same way, God is jealous for our affections. God does not want us to give our affections to anyone or anything other than himself. God is jealous for your heart and wants you to seek him and find your satisfaction in Him, because he knows that He is the only one that can truly satisfy your soul. He knows that the things that this world offers will not satisfy. Him and Him alone satisfies.

I was coming out of my office one day and saw a financially well off man with a beautiful Bentley. I went up to it and walked around it. It really was something. I then said to him, "Nice car." I will never forget what he said. He said, "It's my pride and joy." Now that is a tragedy. Maybe it's not a car for you. Maybe it's the other things we mentioned, but God wants us to find our joy in him. That car for that man or your kids for you will not satisfy.

But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

- James 4:6

Jesus has made it possible for us to receive this grace. This is the gospel! The world really can seem satisfying and can easily be lured in. But thanks be to God for his grace. As we humble ourselves and come to God, not trying to seek happiness on our own, but humbly rid ourselves of self-centeredness and come to Him, we will receive his grace.

It is humbling to admit that you cannot live this life alone. It is humbling to say that you need God! It is humbling to say that your ways are best and not mine. It is humbling to lose your life and take up your cross daily and follow Jesus. But it is ETERNALLY worth it!

Jesus tells a story of a man having two sons. The younger son came to his dad one day and asked for all his inheritance money. He took it and spent it on all the world had to offer. Maybe he went out and bought him a Bentley and a huge house, played golf daily out a Pebble Beach. He spent it all until he had no more. He became completely broke and basically become a beggar. Then one day he came to his sense and said "what am I doing. I am living in sin and I am tired of this. I am going to live this life behind, because I have found out, it is not satisfying and I am going to go back to my Father and ask for his forgiveness." He humbled himself. He did and his Father meet him graciously with joy and a celebration. In the same way, we need to turn from following after this world and return to God and he will be there to give us grace.

Because of the grace of God, we can truly live

Submit yourselves therefore to God.

- James 4:7a

What is the key to receiving this grace and fleeing the world? We are then to submit ourselves to God. Instead of being a friend of the world, we choose to be a friend of God. It is not that we buckle up our boot straps and try harder. No, we are told to go to God. His grace is there for us to take! His satisfaction and joy is there for our eternal hope. Submitting to God has the meaning of making him the Lord of all of our lives.

True joy cannot be found in this world, but it can be found in God. Only God can satisfy and only God can give us the grace we need to find our joy in Him. As I have expressed before, I became a Christian at the young age of 7. College was a huge area of growth in my life. This truth, right here, is what helped me grow by leaps and bounds in my Christian life. This truth helps me to have a more intimate relationship with God and to resist sin more effectively. An amazing exchange takes place. As we choose to give up the fleeting pleasures of this world, we find true happiness in Jesus.

1. We gain intimacy with God

Is it wrong to seek happiness? The answer to this question had a huge impact on my life. The answer is no, if you seeking your happiness in the right place. We were created to find our satisfaction is one thing, and that is in God. This truth is all over Scripture. Psalm 16:11 says, "In His presence is fullness of joy, at his right hand are pleasures forevermore." We can find that nowhere else.

If someone were to tell me that I could have 99% joy for a million years I would not take it, because I know a place where I can find 100% joy forever and I am settling for nothing less. C.S. Lewis says it like 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. We are far too easily pleased."

I have this rope. Let's pretend this rope goes on forever and this little red spot is our life. We focus all of our time and energies into this little red spot. Why are we wasting all of our time and energies into what the world has to offer? When we can have Jesus! As we submit ourselves to God we, find our joy in Him and he helps us fight the world.

2. We begin to kill sin more effectively

When we submit to God as our true joy, we will begin killing sin! The one thing that ruins our joy in God is sin. When sin begins to keep us from our true joy we don't want anything to do with it. We are given commands by James:

“Resist the Devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, be wretched and mourn and weep, humble yourselves.”

- James 4:7b-10

All of things are a result of submitting to the Lord and involve resisting sin. So how do we resist? By submitting to God in the area that you are being tempted. For example, if Satan is telling you that you will be happy if you are tempted to go on that internet sight - you say no! God says “blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.” I want to see God because Jesus is my fullness of joy forever! His ways are better than yours Satan. So, in Jesus name, no. We know that our life in Jesus is far greater than anything Satan can entice us with. When you are tempted with fear or worry, we can say no!

This verse says by the grace of God and he will flee from you! Sometimes for me this looks like verbally rejecting the lies of Satan in Jesus name. The question we must ask is that “Do we want God more than sin?” We fight the power of lust, pride, anger with a superior power and promise. We get God.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you

- James 4:8a

“Draw near to God.” This is a call to repentance. We are to turn from our sin and come to God. This is again a call to go to God, your joy. There is satisfaction and joy drawing near to God. He will draw near to you!

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded”

- James 4:8b

We need to be a pure people. By God's grace not only our outside but our inside must be pure. We must fight to be pure in all areas of life. Yes our behaviors but also the way we think. As we do this, God will be there! We will get more of God!

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

- James 4:9

This is not some call for us to not be happy and to be miserable. It is a call to mourn and weep over our sin, understand the seriousness of sin and to hate it like God hates it.

Do we truly see sin for what it is? How easy it is for us to treat sin as not a very big deal. James is reminding us that sin is a very big deal and should break us! It should break us because it hurts our intimacy with Jesus. When we sin, it does not in any way cause us to lose our salvation, but it does affect our intimacy with God. When we sin against God, it should break our hearts.

Those who are friends with the world don't see sin as that big of a deal. In fact, they love sin. This truth is where true growth takes place. It shows us our need and makes God's love and grace more glorious. It leads us to find our satisfaction in the only one that can truly satisfy. Do we grieve over our sin? Are we broken over our sin? Ask God to break your heart for what breaks His.

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

- James 4:10

Again, we are coming back to the idea of humility. If we humble ourselves and come to God, that is where our true joy is found. As we humbly come to God, James tells us that he will exalt you.

The bible says that it was at that time that the son came to his senses and turned from his wicked ways, humbled himself, and went back to his father. Instead of the father punishing him and getting angry, the father did the exact opposite:

As soon as the father saw the son he ran after him. When he reached him he hugged him and kissed him. The father said to his servants,[d] 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

- Luke 15:20-24

The son was exalted and received true joy when he humbled himself and came to his father. The father in this story is God. Just like this is true for the prodigal son, it is true of us. As we fight sin and resist being friends of the world, we will be exalted. We will have life to the fullest, because we will be friends with God. The true joy of our hearts.