

James 4:1-3. The Intent Of The Heart!

Friends last week we finished off James chapter 3 by looking at v17-18. 'So Everyone Knows Who We Are' I called the sermon, as he returned to that "wisdom that comes from above," from God, of v13. After addressing that other "wisdom of the world" which at its heart has "bitter envy and selfish ambition" v14-16, he contrasts those things, with eight attributes that will mark the true follower of Christ. And to some degree, he even uses the Lord's own words to do so! He says in v17, that these people's wisdom from God "is first of all pure;" that Geek word, "agne" meaning chaste. That purity within a married relationship. Captured by King David in Psalm 24 and by the Lord Himself in Matthew 5:8: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God." Yes their devotion to God is "pure," they have hearts only for Him. Yes it speaks of the intention of the heart. They are still sinners, they still need Christ's Blood, but in His mercy, God looks at the intent of their heart!

Next we looked at 'peace loving'. Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." We are to seek peace, even if we are not at fault when difficulties arise. And also endeavour to bring peace between brethren, when called on by God to do so. But this "peace" must never come at the cost of compromising God's Word of truth. "It is written," "It is written," "It is written," Jesus said!

Then we looked at "Considerate and submissive." Considerate meaning: bearing with one another. Seeking to see only the best in each other! Next is "submissive:" meaning to be reasonable, being prepared to see the other person's point of view. Not compromising God's Word, but being a good listener. Then it was "full of mercy and good fruit." Being full of graciousness and forgiveness, remembering how much mercy God has shown to us through Jesus. But not only forgiveness in our hearts, it's also being full of merciful acts of kindness! And finally, "impartial and sincere." Showing no favour to people merely because of their wealth or standing. And underlying all of these godly attributes with "sincerity," being genuine. No hidden agendas or ambitions.

We are who we are because of, and for the sake of, the Lord Jesus! Yes all of these things we bear, so that everyone knows who we are. It must always be glory to you O God, as we seek to testify to Jesus our Blessed Saviour!

And now we pick James' letter in chapter 4:1-3. 'The Intention Of The Heart!' V1: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" Now brothers and sisters, although there is the beginning of new chapter here, we need to remember that originally, that is not how it was first written. What James says in chapter 4:1 flows directly from chapter 3:17-18. And did you notice? Just like anyone else when they're writing a letter and their thoughts are flowing, there is almost a to-ing and fro-ing that is occurring within His thinking!

Chapter 3:1 begins with him warning us of becoming one of those ecclesiastical ladder climbers, wanting to be the "teacher," even the master of others. And he addresses that vanity, by explaining the dangers of an unrestrained tongue. And of course this all began, with him challenging those who professed to be Christian and yet their verbal profession, was all they seem to have. Chapter 2:14: "What good is it my brothers if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds." Chapter 2:26: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." And of course the evils of the tongue in chapter 3:1-12, flow on from that! In chapter 3:13, he contrasts those people, with the ones who do indeed possess that "heavenly wisdom." And they showed this, through their selfless acts of righteous humility. Then in verses 14-16, he returns to those embittered, ambitious power mongers!

Verses 17 and 18, flow on from verse 13, as he shows us those heavenly attributes of the Kingdom dwellers. And having done this, he yet again returns to that other wisdom, that which is not of heaven but of the earth, and fallen humanity. Again contrasting them, with those genuine believers of v17 and 18. Yes he keeps going back and forth, between those of the Kingdom, and those who claim to be of the Kingdom. All while challenging them, and also the genuine believer as he does so! Having explained all of that, we now come back to the self-obsessed persons, who claims to be Christian! Having just said: "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

Chapter 4:1: "What causes quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the desires that battle within you?" He asks, What is the source of all of the troubles that are going on within the churches? The original uses the words "wars and battles" or conflicts. But hang on, isn't he writing to believers? Well yes he is. At least, (as we have been seeing) that they are those who claim to be believers. Whether or not they really are, as in any church, only God knows. That's holy ground, only He gets to walk there. Only He knows those who truly belong to Himself. But if someone professes to be Christian, then they are accountable to come under the authority of God through His Word because of that profession. And we must humbly seek to bring them under authority of that Word! The other question though; is were these "wars and conflicts" actually occurring within the early church? Or is James merely speaking hypothetically? Well of course the answer is yes, these things were actually happening. That's the reason that he writes as he does, because he was addressing particular problems. "Wars and conflicts." Oh dear friends, is this a picture of the church? The true church? Well sadly, often times it is. Oftentimes those godly attributes which flow from, and are of the King, are not what we find within the church. Sadly, oftentimes it is anything but those things. No doubt that's why James firstly holds up those things, to show his readers what they should be, and also what they were not! Yes as we've been seeing in those godly characteristics who he has shown them, and us, is Jesus! "What causes wars and conflicts among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" The word he uses for "desires" here, in Greek is "hedone" and it means pleasures, passions. It's where we get the words hedonistic and hedonism from. Which are the pursuit of sensual, self-indulgence. And the other word that encapsulates "battle within you," is "strateuomenon" and it means soldiering, waging war. So these "wars, these conflicts," were erupting from that overwhelming inner "desire" of people to please themselves, in whatever way shape or form those things may have taken. And with little or no regard for anyone else! And Beloved, surely never before throughout human history has this been more true than it is today. People's perversions are being thrust into our faces everywhere we look. And it is not enough that they want to live in an unnatural perverse way, (that's between them and their Maker) no that's not enough. They are seeking to force us to accept them that way. And horrendously, the laws of our land, are also seeking to force us to do the same! But friends, that is indeed "the wisdom of the world," it cannot be that way in God's church. As we know, the world says, if it feels good do it. Please yourself and everyone else be damned, as the saying goes. But believers cannot be driven by evil self-centred ambitious sensual passions. As we saw, those eight attributes we're all about the other person. About "humble," "pure," selfless service and intention. And yet what James speaks of here, has nothing to do with those things! No this yet again is all about self. What my ambition and my lust "desires." Yes this is what "the wisdom of the world" says. But God through Paul says something different in Romans 12:1-2: "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will." So although the world in which we live comes to certain conclusions of what is good and fitting, we must not allow ourselves to give into those things. No we must not "conform to this world," we must be "transformed by the renewing of our minds" within the Word of God!

Friend's this "renewing of our minds" is a never ending process, and it will only come to a conclusion when we stand in glory. And having said that, who knows? Perhaps it will only be then that it truly begins! And did you notice? These "wars and conflicts" that begin within us, if we give in to them, are then used by the Evil One to wreak havoc within the church. But as he said in chapter 3:10: "My brothers, this should not be!" In v2a and b, James explains the way this kind of self-obsessed, sensual "desire," can ultimately be expressed.

And with Blanchard 's direction, I've altered the structure of the verse ever so slightly. But be at ease, it is in accordance with the N.A.S.V. And it reads as such: "You want something but you don't get it, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot have what you want, so you quarrel and fight." Yes this "war," which is being waged within these people, as their "sensual desires" become unconstrained, (in whatever form they take) can ultimately burst forth in these following ways: "*You want something but you don't get it, so you kill.*"

Friends again the question must be asked. Can he really be writing this to a group of believers? Surely not. "You want something but you don't get it, so you kill." When looking at this verse, I couldn't help but be drawn to the image in my mind of the character Gollum in the trilogy Lord Of The Rings. As Smeagol, he wanted this ring so badly, that he could not stop thinking about it night and day. His thoughts taunted him so much, that eventually he picked up a rock and crushed the skull of the owner of the ring. And eventually he became Gollum, this slimy creature of the underworld! Oh but that is only in the movies. Well, no!

When Samuel is tasked with choosing David from out of all of Jesse's sons we understand something very important about God. Beginning with the biggest and most handsome, God says in 1 Samuel 16:7:"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." And speaking to Saul, in 1 Samuel 13:13-14 we read: "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and has appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command." Yes David was that man "after God's own heart."

Yet in 2 Samuel 11:1-5 we read of a very different David. "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the King's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. (*May I suggest to survey all of his great achievements and kingdom.*) From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. She had purified herself from her uncleanness. (*Now this is significant, because it shows us that the child which would be born could not be Uriah's child*) The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

Dear friends as many of us know, David's lust of wanting that which he "could not have," would eventually lead to him having Uriah the Hittite murdered by proxy. Yes Uriah that convert to Judaism. One of David's "Mighty men" the scriptures record. Who would never even think of going in to enjoy the pleasures of his beautiful wife Bathsheba, while his men remained at the battlefield. Yes Uriah, who would have willingly laid down his life for his king. He was far more righteous than David! And David, that "man after God's own heart," having violated Uriah's wife and sought to cover up his evil, eventually had this his trusted warrior, murdered by proxy during the battle. And perhaps the most

despicable part of this horrendous plan, is that David placed the very orders into Uriah's hands, that would eventually have him killed!

Beloved, well did Jesus say in Matthew 6:21-22a: "You've heard that it was said to the people long ago do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement. (*Meaning subject to the fires of hell*) But I tell you, anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement." But why did Jesus say this? Well, as with Cain, whose burning, seething anger led to him murdering his brother Abel, anger is the seed of murder. Simply the fruit of another kind of burning sensual desire! "You want something but you cannot have it, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot have what you want, so you quarrel and fight." Yes you "wage war."

Beloved, both Cain and David were guilty of both covetousness and murder. Cain was jealous of Abel's favour from God, and David lusted after that one woman, yes that one kind of woman that he could not have in all of the hundreds of thousands of women throughout his Kingdom. The wife of another man! These men's lusts led to murder. And friends as I have mentioned many times before, we can be murderers in many ways, not just physically. We can murder a person's character by cowardly slandering them behind their back. And at the same time, we can murder their trust, even breaking a confidence they may have shared with us. We can even murder their zeal for the Lord, by a thoughtless disparaging comment. Yes we can wage a murderous war with our words, as we have learned from James, time and time again, with the evils of an unbridled tongue! Friends what a powerful contrast these things are, compared to those eight godly attributes which clearly speak to us of Christ!

And in the third part of chapter 2, we begin to see the kind of prayer life that flows from these self-obsessed people: "You do not have, because you do not ask God." So the first thing that we learn about these self-centred people, is that they are so consumed by themselves, that they have no time for prayer at all. "You do not have because you do not ask God." No they have no need for God you see. They are self-sufficient. Perhaps like the Pharisees and the religious elite of the day. Oh they had all the right markings, but inwardly they burned with "sensual desires" of every kind of evil.

Beloved there was a little book written many years ago entitled; Too Busy Not To Pray. Now we might not be these self-obsessed people, and yet the busyness of life, has forced prayer out of our own lives. But as with any relationship, if there is no communication, there is no relationship at all. Prayer is how we communicate with God. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 130:5: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my trust." Psalm 23:2: "He makes me lie down in green pastures he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul." And finally Psalm 46:10a: "Be still and know that I am God."

Friends all of these verses speak of the need for us to be quiet before the Lord in prayer. So we can pour out our hearts to Him as He "restores our soul." But these others, have no need for such foolish things. "You do not have because you do not ask God. v3 When you ask you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend what you get on your pleasures," your "sensual desires!" Now from James' words, we can even glean the very nature of their prayers, can't we. In just three verses, James uses the word "You" 15 times. Beloved, as with such people's lives, their prayers, (that is when they do actually pray) are all about themselves. Give me victory in my job promotion and I will give you glory! Lord give me this, give me that, that I might do your work. I'll be at Bible study twice a week, and in church three times on Sunday!

But brothers and sisters, such notions are a self-obsessed delusion. Chapter 3:13: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes

from wisdom.” 3:17: “But wisdom that comes from heaven, is first of all pure.” Yes that purity of intention. But these people: “When you ask you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.” Oh friends, we live in a self-obsessed world don't we? You walk through the streets or drive by the schools in the mornings, and there are many people who don't even look up anymore. I often make a point of saying to them, how are you doing? So many people constantly have their head down in their phones. Many people even record their whole lives. If they brush their teeth, if they comb their hair or make their bed, they put it online. And still other people actually watch these things. I just don't get it. No friends, that self-obsessed life, does not “come from above,” from God! “Deeds done in humility.” “First of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

Beloved, of course prayer can and should be about ourselves at times. ‘Lord help me in this situation to honour you.’ ‘Father forgive me and change me to be more like Jesus.’ ‘Help me Lord to love my spouse, your people, and my neighbour selflessly. The way you call me to.’ ‘Good Lord, glorify your Name in my achievements.’ ‘Father God, I thank you for your infinite and daily mercies to me!’ And brothers and sisters, whenever we do pray, in whatever the situation is, (whether it is for ourselves or on behalf of others) we must pray as the Lord Jesus Himself did when in the garden of Gethsemane: “Father not my will but thine be done.” Yes Lord God answer these prayers as You see fit in the council of Your Own Plan and Will. Yes it must always be brothers and sisters, Glory be to you O God, as I said last time!

So friends to close this morning, we need to be “peacemakers who sow in peace so that we can raise a harvest of righteousness.” A harvest of those things that speak of our growing relationship with God. We are not to burn with wretched thoughts and a callous heart. But with pure intentions that come from above, and which renew our hearts from within. Yes it's all about the intention of the heart! Amen!

Let's pray.