

Title: James – God's Will? Or Your Will?

Text: James 4:1-12

“What causes fights and quarrels among you?” James asks.

What a question for people living in contentious times!

- Have any of you experienced any quarrels or fights lately?
- Any political discussions that have gotten a little heated?

We live in a highly polarized and quarrelsome culture currently

- and with a presidential election approaching in November,  
-wow, it's hard to avoid contentiousness and quarrels.

As we come back in on this letter of James today,

- I want to remind us a that at the end of chapter 3 last week,  
James wrote: “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a  
harvest of righteousness.” (Say it again).

Today James addresses the lack of peacemaking in the  
Christian communities of his day, and asks,

- “What causes fights and quarrels among you?”  
-In other words, what is it that disturbs the peace among us?

And his answer is: our unfulfilled desires.

- We want something, but we don't get it.
- We covet something, but we can't have it.
- And it makes us mad.
- And so we quarrel and fight, he says.

This builds on that same theme of envy and selfish ambition  
James was addressing in chapter 3.

- We want what others have, and we make it our ambition to  
get what we want.
- And we will fight to get what we want, and quarrel with others  
who might stand in our way.

It's pretty much the way the world works.

- And it's not just about getting more things, like new jobs,  
better houses, cooler techno-devices.
- A great deal of the conflict and fighting in our country and the  
world is because of competing desires for “the way we want  
our country to be.”
  - Conservatives generally desire to preserve the way things  
are and the way things used to be,
  - and Liberals generally desire to change the way things are  
and progress into a new and different future.
- And those different core desires make them butt heads all  
the time.

James wants to point us to a different way: the way of God.

-He says we all ought to take our desires to God and ask Him what He wants.

-And James says, when we ask, we need to leave our own motives and desires behind.

-He says, "You ask and don't receive, because you ask with wrong motives.

-You ask because you really just want your own will and your own way.

-You want God to give you what you.

-And what you really want is to get your own way.

-Or you want to be proven right, so the other guys are proven wrong.

-You might be praying, but you really want to go ahead with the plan you had before you ever asked God.

And we can tell that's true, because if God doesn't answer our prayer in the way we want Him to, we get mad.

-I don't know about you, but I hate it when God doesn't rule the universe in the way I want the universe ruled.

-We have "control issues," don't we?

We have desires and expectations, and when they go unfulfilled we get frustrated, irritated, angry, depressed.

"O, you adulterous people," James says.

-And wow, that is a challenging word.

-It's actually is a word straight from the prophets of Israel.

-That is a word God spoke through his prophets to his people Israel, again and again throughout the Old Testament.

-And God used that word because His people were in a covenant relationship with him just like a marriage.

-It was meant to be a covenant of loving relationship.

-A covenant of faithfulness and fruitfulness.

But again and again, in order to get their inner desires met,

-God's people ran after other gods:

-the idols and local gods of all the countries and cultures around them.

-That's who they turned to when they wanted fertile crops, or fertile cattle, or fertile wives, or whatever else.

-They were unfaithful to the covenant they had made with God again and again in every generation,

-and God called it "adultery."

And God also used the word "jealous" to describe how He

felt about their betrayal.

-God called himself a “jealous God.”

-And it is not a nice characteristic.

-But in the case of a covenant relationship of marriage, it does accurately describe the feeling one partner has when the other partner is unfaithful to them.

-The faithful partner is hurt by the betrayal, and is jealous for the love of the unfaithful partner.

-The love is still there, and it longs to be reciprocated.

-It longs to have the unfaithful partner repent and return and for the relationship to be restored.

-It’s jealous that the love that should be theirs is being spent on someone else.

This is the very language James uses in these verses as he addresses Christian brothers and sisters all over the Roman Empire.

-He calls all of those who have drifted into following the ways of the world around them to come back.

-He says, “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?”

-Don’t you know that anyone who chooses to embrace the world is actually forsaking God?

And then he uses that word jealous, “Or do you think the Scripture says without reason that He jealously longs for the spirit he caused to dwell within us?”

-Or the ESV translates this, “he yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.”

And most commentators agree that James is talking not talking about the Holy Spirit here.

-He’s referring back to Genesis when God created Adam and Eve and breathed his “breath” or “spirit” into them and made them living beings.

-James is saying that ever since the Fall into sin, when we were separated from God,

-God has yearned for us,

-and yearned for the relationship we were meant to have with Him.

-and yearned for our spirit to reconnect to His Spirit,

-And of course, the rest of the Bible tells the story of the great lengths to which God has gone in order to restore that connection,

and restore us to life in relationship with Him again.

And James says in verse 6, that God does this by giving us more grace, again and again to draw us back.

- He says God opposes the proud who think they have no need of His grace,
  - but to the humble who are ready to receive it, He gives grace upon grace.

So James ardent plea in his own day and for us today, is that we would all humbly submit ourselves to God and His grace.

- That we would resist the temptations of the devil and of the world.
  - Flee from them, he says, and they will flee from you.
- If you come near to God, James says, God will come near to you.
  - So wash your hands and purify your hearts.
    - Give up the sin and the doubleminded ways.
    - Grieve, mourn, wail, he says!
    - Stop laughing and start crying, he says!
    - Humble yourselves...and God will lift you up.

It's quite the call to repentance. And it is a call not to "the world out there," but to God's own people.

- In verse 12 James address his readers again as brothers.
- These are fellow believers he is calling to repentance.
- Believers living in the Greco-Roman culture of their day, and who have been drifting with the current of the culture all around them.

- And his clarion call is to come back to God.
  - Turn to Him in prayer.
  - Humble yourself before him.
  - Leave your agenda at the door.
  - Come with empty hands and ask humbly for His will and His ways.
- And stop your quarreling with each other. Let it go.
  - Stop your judging of each other. Let it go.

And positively stated, James is calling us once again to the royal law of love: love your neighbor as yourself.

- Do you remember that royal law of love James called us to back in chapter 2:8?
  - That's what he's talking about here again.

- He says that when we judge one another we are scorning "the law," and he means that law of love.
  - We are putting ourselves in the place of God, and we are looking down on our neighbor instead of loving them.
- But there is only one God, James says, and only one lawgiver and judge, and it's not me or you.

But is it James either?!

-I mean, he is telling all of us not to put ourselves in the place of God and judge each other,  
-but isn't he being a little "judgmental" here himself?!

He's coming on a little strong here, isn't he?

But is it judgment? And is he being quarrelsome and fighting with these believers?

-Well, I don't think so. And the difference is the motivation.

-James' whole purpose in writing this letter, as we have seen since the opening verses of the letter,  
-is to help disciples of Jesus grow to maturity.

-He wants Christians everywhere to be whole and complete, and so receive the crown of life God has promised to those He loves.

James' motivation all through this letter is not to tear these brothers and sisters down, but to build them up.

-And his desire is not impose his own will and his own way on them, but to remind them of God's will and God's ways and call them to grow in those ways.

And here's something you might not have known about James.

-The early church had a nickname for him, and it wasn't "the old crab!"

-It was "old camel-knees."

Eusebius, the 4<sup>th</sup> Century church historian wrote of James, *that "he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple (at Jerusalem), and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.*

That's why James was sometimes affectionately called, "Old camel knees."

-That tells us something about the heart of the man who wrote these verses we're reading today.

-His words are pretty convicting,

-but the man who wrote these words spent hours a day on his knees praying for those he was writing to,

-and praying for the forgiveness of any who were straying.

His words come from a heart of love for the Father, and an earnest love for God's people.

He was actually living out the royal law of love, because that was the motivation from which he wrote.

He wasn't mad at the people because he wasn't getting his way.

He wasn't being quarrelsome because they weren't living up to his expectations and desires.

He was trying to remind them of the goodness and grace of God,  
-and call them away from the wily ways of the world which never really satisfy,  
-and which produce such conflict and division because of selfishness and sin.

Old Camel-knees!

We need to be praying for each other like he did.  
-Regularly.

Don't you get tired of the quarrelsomeness of the world in which we are living at the moment?  
-We treat everyone who disagrees with us an enemy.  
-And we all seem to be so caught up in what we are against, that we all seem to have forgotten what we are for!

James would say, "How about if we all get down on our knees and humbly ask God what He might want.  
-Why don't we confess our sin and selfishness, and let go of our own desires and kingdom making schemes,  
-and pray for more of God's Kingdom to come, and God's will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven.

James says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.  
-Maybe a little humility might go a long way in the world at the moment.  
-Maybe a little humility might go along way in each of us at the moment ourselves.

"Submit yourselves to God," James writes. "Come near to God and He will come near to you."

We might as well start right here with us, right?  
Will you bow with me in prayer?