

## Sunday, August 22, 2021 | Summer Baggage

Week 3 | James 4:1-10 | "Dispelling Jealousy"

### Announcements:

- Don't forget about our Church Picnic on Sunday, September 12.
- We won't be streaming next week's message due to our guest speaking being from the Middle East.

Summer Baggage is a three-week series that uncovers some of the heaviest weights we tend to carry around with us. These burdens can make life more challenging than it needs to be and often leads to more difficulties. In this study, we'll learn that if we leave our emotions to fester, it is only a matter of time before our luggage bursts open, leaving a mess in its wake.

In week 1, we unpacked the first baggage, which was bitterness. We can never offend each other more than we have offended God. So if God's forgiveness is unending, so too should our forgiveness be without end. To make excuses for a bitter heart is to excuse one's self from the family of God. If we are to show the forgiveness of God to others, a community of the forgiven must be a forgiving community.

Last week, we unpacked the baggage of fear. The Bible speaks a lot about fear. And, if you'll remember, we turned to Psalm 23 to help us cope with our fears. We learned that the Good Shepherd not only *provides* for His flock, but He *protects* His flock. Because of the very presence of our Shepherd in our daily lives, we do not have to be afraid. We can lie down beside still waters to take a nap or sit peaceably at a table to eat. It doesn't matter if those waters are in a dark valley or seated with us at the table are our enemies. So long as God is with us, we have nothing to fear.

---

Today, as we close out our series, we'll be looking at the baggage of jealousy. Covetousness was such a problem for the Israelites that God made sure to address it in His top ten commandments: *thou shalt not covet* (cf. Ex. 20:17). The Lord actually gets pretty specific in what He meant when he said this as He explains that the Israelites weren't allowed to lust after their neighbor's house, his wife, his servants, or even his animals. So, basically, if your neighbor owns it, do not, under any circumstances, pine after it.

This commandment comes in at the tenth spot for a good reason, as envy often leads to more violence. For instance, the very first murder ever committed by the human race was motivated by resentment (cf. Gen. 4). Later on in Genesis, we come upon probably the best example of

jealously fueled violence in the story of Joseph. Jacob was not shy in his love for Joseph and, because of that favoritism, the other brothers plotted to kill Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:4). And this problem isn't only confined to the family, as with the Cain/Able story and the Joseph story, but it's also a problem within politics. For example, it was clear that David was to replace Saul on the throne of Israel. But rather than step down graciously, Saul positioned himself against David simply because he was envious of the attention and admiration that David was getting (cf. 1 Sam. 18). And on multiple occasions, Saul would try to kill David even though God had chosen David.

Today, we are unlucky to have things like TV, movies, and the internet that constantly refuels our jealousy. How many of us have been watching TV and then a commercial interrupts our show to tell us about something we must-have for the low, low, price of \_\_\_\_\_? Or, maybe we're watching a movie, and some actor or actress comes on the screen which is so buff or so beautiful, you wonder to yourself if they've been augmented with CGI. Or, even worse, after opening up Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we see our friends and family living out their perfectly photoshopped lives on the beach while we sit alone at our desks eating a bowl of cold ramen.

Everywhere we look, we are comparing ourselves to everyone else. And it's not only robbing us of our *happiness* but, more importantly, it is robbing us of our *godliness*. If we do not unpack our envy daily, the luggage of jealousy will absolutely ruin our lives. Adults will get into mounds of debt trying to "keep up with the Joneses." Parents will unintentionally demoralize their own kids by comparing them to someone else's kids. Instead of viewing their worth through what Christ has done for them, teens will attach their self-esteem to some pointless metric like views, clicks, likes, shares, and/or followers.

So, what are we to do with our jealousy? How do we cope with our proclivity to covet our neighbor's stuff? What do we do with this feeling of inadequacy that arises when someone has something we don't?

To answer that, we must look to the advice given by none other than the very brother of Jesus Christ, James.

**READ:** James 4:1-10 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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”? <sup>6</sup> But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Jealously does three things:

**i. Jealously causes discord.**

<sup>1</sup> What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

Now, there is some disagreement about whether or not James was speaking literally or metaphorically.

Those who propose that he was speaking literally point out that almost every time the Greek words **πόλεμος** (pó-le-mos) “quarrels” and **μάχη** (ma-kh'ay) “fights” are used in NT literature, they are almost always referring to actual physical violence.<sup>1</sup> Combine this with the fact that James was writing to a community of former Israelite zealots who were known to settle their disputes with Rome through violence; it isn't hard to imagine that when James was speaking about conflict, he meant the kind that leads to actual bloodshed.

However, others argue that if James were referring to actual fighting, which led to this sort of brutality, surely, he would've spoken about it at length rather than a few passing comments.<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case considering James wrote to believers. What's

---

<sup>1</sup> McKnight, Scot, *The Letter of James*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2011), p. 321-322.

<sup>2</sup> Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, England; Eerdmans, 2000), p. 179-180.

more, Jesus equated anger with murder (cf. Mat. 5:21-22), a theme that the Beloved Disciple picked up when he said, in 1 Jn. 3:15, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Thus, it seems more likely that James was evoking the seriousness of their mistakes by using intense metaphorical language.

However you slice it, all commentators agree that the point James was making is that conflicts from without are indicative of conflicts from within. Meaning, human beings fight, whether verbally or physically, because they have passions that war in their hearts. They are driven by desires, like jealousy, to take what isn't theirs, resulting in conflict.

Ironically, the one people group who is supposed to be known for its peace has been known, at times, for the exact opposite. A Jewish philosopher in the 17<sup>th</sup> century opined, "I have often wondered that persons who make boast of professing the Christian religion—namely love, joy peace, temperance, and charity to all men—should quarrel with such rancorous animosity and display daily towards one another such bitter hatred, that this, rather than the virtues which they profess, is the readiest criteria of their faith."<sup>3</sup> What's more, one need only look at the violence surrounding the Crusades, the Reformation, and even the January 6<sup>th</sup> riot on the capital to know that claiming to be a Christian does not guarantee that the believer will not be lured away by the prospect of violence. A heart that has followed Jesus in faith is not immune to the temptation of verbal or physical assault if it is a means to an end.

## **ii. Jealously cripples our prayer life.**

You do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

James has already warned his readers that the double-minded person in their faith will not experience answered prayer (cf. Ja. 1:5-8). James said that the one who doubts, as in, a person harboring unbelief, is like a wave in the sea tossed by the wind. He now explains that there are two other reasons which explain why prayer might not be answered.

### **a. They were not asking at all.**

When James says this, he playing off of Jesus' own words in Mat. 7:7-11 where the Messiah said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for

---

<sup>3</sup> Moo (2000), p. 181.

bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" Jesus, like James, affirmed the principle that God is a good Father who is willing to give His children good gifts. This is not to say that God would provide us with everything we wanted. Instead, Jesus explains that God desires to provide us with the very best. That best may not always coincide with what we think of as best, but the principle remains.

The problem that James was addressing was that his readers weren't even asking God for the things that God wanted to give them. What it was precisely that God wanted them to have is somewhat unknown. But, given the context of James, it appears that he was speaking specifically about wisdom. If there is one thing that God wants us to have, other than His Son, it is wisdom. Yet, the people James was writing to didn't even ask.

**b. When they did ask, they asked for the wrong reasons.**

Now he says that they asked for the wrong reasons in the rare moments when they did ask. They asked, he explains, because they wanted to "spend" their prayers on their "passions." And in saying that they "spend" their prayers, James is likening prayer to currency. Thus, rather than paying out their petitions in service to God, they did it in service to their own "passions." Meaning, their motivation for asking God was so that they might promote their own self-interests rather than God's.

As I mentioned before, God should be viewed as a benevolent Father; one who gives His children good gifts but will not spoil them. Those to whom James was writing had a view of God that likened Him to some divine "vending machine."<sup>4</sup> They thought that they need only put in the proper change and press the correct buttons, and out would pop whatever they wanted. What's remarkable is that if our theory about them asking for wisdom is true, it means that even something as wholesome as wisdom can be requested for the wrong reasons. How many have sought knowledge, even biblical knowledge, with the intent of promoting themselves rather than God? This is why Paul warns those who possess knowledge that they will have a tendency to be prideful. As he says in 1 Cor. 8:1-3, "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God,

---

<sup>4</sup> Scot (2011), p. 330.

he is known by God.” It is much better to love God and others well than gain more knowledge. Likewise, for James’ audience, it is much better to have a flourishing prayer life than to have all the knowledge in the world and not be able to speak with God. Jealousy, if we’re not careful, will become our primary motivation to pray. And when that happens, we should assume that God will not answer those prayers. To do so would further encourage bad behavior. And, as a good Father, God will do everything in his power to cultivate a Christ-like mindset. Everything that is contrary to that goal He will discourage.

It is often said that God always answers prayers, but sometimes the answer He gives is no. And, while this is true, we should also ponder why it is that God may have had to say no. In many of those cases, I think we would agree that God said no, not because we were asking for the wrong things, but because we were asking for the wrong reasons. All requests, even ones that appear to be good and wholesome, must be weighed against God’s glory. For, even if one were to ask for wisdom, God would have to say no if the person who asked it only asked for it because they wanted to be wiser than their peers. Ambition—that is, self-aggrandizement—is a terrible motivation to pray.

### iii. Jealously crushes our relationship with God

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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”?

Here, James uses some relatively strong language. He calls them "adulterers." One would be tempted to think he was speaking to unbelievers. But, as we've mentioned before, James wrote this letter to a community of believers (cf. Ja. 1:2, 16, 19). Thus, James tells his friends and family that in harboring jealousy in their hearts causes conflict and cripples their prayer life, and has put them at odds with God. Because they are being ruled by their sinful passions, they have become unfaithful in the same way that a wife who sleeps around on her husband has been unfaithful. This language recalls many OT passages where Israel disobeyed God, inviting idols into their worship and so became adulterous in God’s eyes (cf. Hosea).

He layers on top of the imagery of adultery with the imagery of war. He says that not only have they had an affair with their world, but they have also become its companion. And to be a companion of the world means you hate ("enmity") God. Antagonism with God is born when a believer cozies up to the world, allowing the world to influence their actions. In doing so, the

Christian, who is supposed to be not only the friend of God but the very bride of Christ, becomes an outright enemy and sleeps around.

To make his audience understand how egregious this was, James explains that God “[yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us.](#)” James is comparing human jealousy with divine jealousy. After all, jealousy in and of itself is not immoral. It is only when jealousy arises out of a desire to have something that isn't right that it becomes sinful. But when someone is jealous of something rightfully theirs or something they have created, the jealousy is justified. For instance, in marriage, if one partner is being shown attention by someone who is not a part of that marriage, the other partner has every right to be jealous and speak up. Or, should someone create something, they will naturally be possessive of that thing. In the realm of academia, plagiarism is a gross infraction. How many of us have felt rage when a dog relieves itself on your expertly manicured lawn?

In the case of God, He has not only entered into a relationship with us that is akin to marriage (Eph. 5:25), but He is also the one who literally made us. We are, in the most basic understanding, God's property. This is what James means when he says God is jealous about the “spirit he has made to dwell in us.” Genesis tells us that God made man and breathed into us the breath of life, and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). The spirit we possess is the handiwork of God. And God, as our Creator, has every right to assert His claim on His creation.

Every wife and husband is understandably upset if their significant other looks at someone else with longing in their heart, even more so when one who was supposed to be faithful gives themselves away to another. God is no different. He is rightfully and righteously jealous of us since He is not only made us in His image, but He has redeemed us with His Son. Flirting with the world breaks the heart of God. Moral jealousy rightly asserts, "That is mine, I should have it;" whereas immoral jealousy wrongly insists, "That is not mine, but I should still have it."

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

Sensing his audience may be on the verge of despair, James finally suspends his condemnation and gives his readers a way to mend what is broken.

### **READ: James 4:6-10 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” <sup>7</sup> [Submit](#) yourselves therefore to God. [Resist](#) the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> [Draw near](#) to God, and he will draw near to you. [Cleanse](#) your hands, you sinners, and [purify](#) your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> [Be wretched](#) and [mourn](#) and

weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

**Humbly submitting yourself to God utterly dispels our jealousy towards others.**

While I am tempted to go through in detail what all ten imperatives mean, for the sake of time, I will simply say that everything which follows the initial command to “submit” is an explanation of what it means to actually submit.

- Submitting one's self assumes you will resist the devil and his devices. James promises that the one who does this will see the Devil himself turn tail and run. And, significantly, the Devil flees not in the face of human intelligence or ingenuity but in the presence of one who has submitted themselves to God.
- Submitting one's self assumes that you doing everything in your power to draw near to God. And, once again, James promises that a relationship with God is reciprocal. As you draw near to Him, He will draw near to you.
- Submitting one's self assumes that you will "cleanse" your hands and "purify" your hearts. The implication being that those who are humble in the sight of God will not only confess the sins they've actually done in the real world as well as the sins they have committed in their minds.
- Submitting one's self assumes that when we have sinned, we will not simply make confession with our lips, but we will be so grieved that we will mourn and weeps over our sin. True repentance comes occurs when one wipes the smile off their face, turning their laughing into languishing.

James then restates what he stated in verse 7, that those who humble themselves now will be exalted by the Lord later. As in all things, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, the way up is down. The way to joy is mourning. The way to victory is submission.

**So, what's the takeaway?**

**Humbly submitting yourself to God utterly dispels our jealousy towards others.**



## Video Description

Summer Baggage | Week 3 | “Dispelling Jealousy”

TEXT: James 4:1-10

Today, we are unlucky to have things like TV, movies, and the internet that constantly refuels our jealousy. How many of us have been watching TV and then a commercial interrupts our show to tell us about something we must-have for the low, low, price of \_\_\_\_\_? Or, maybe we're watching a movie, and some actor or actress comes on the screen which is so buff or so beautiful, you wonder to yourself if they've been augmented with CGI. Or, even worse, after opening up Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we see our friends and family living out their perfectly photoshopped lives on the beach while we sit alone at our desks eating a bowl of cold ramen.

Everywhere we look, we are comparing ourselves to everyone else. And it's not only robbing us of our *happiness* but, more importantly, it is robbing us of our *godliness*. If we do not unpack our envy daily, the luggage of jealousy will absolutely ruin our lives. And, as we'll see into today's passage, **humbly submitting yourself to God utterly dispels our jealousy towards others.** Only when we bend the knee to God will we find the shackles of covetousness broken.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: