

Conflict – Part 1

- We are studying the book of James (actually a letter) and we are getting towards the end of the letter.
- James, the half-brother of Jesus, was writing to Jesus-followers about their life and conduct. He is writing to them about the AUTHENTIC FAITH that PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS.
- There is an intimate connection between what we believe and what we do. It is actually impossible to disconnect the two, so James focuses on the way they are living as a reflection on what they actually believe, not what they say they believe.
- Last week we looked at true wisdom. The kind of wisdom that impacts how we live in a positive way, both for us and for others. We examined where this comes from, what it looks like and what the results are.
- As James has done frequently throughout the letter, he transitions from this thought to the next using a question. The thoughts are not disconnected, but actually build one on the next.

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you?

- What makes you angry? What causes you to get upset with other people?
- Here's a question I want you to consider for a minutes. "What is your relationship with anger?"
- If I was to ask your husband/wife/kids/boss/girlfriend/boyfriend about your relationship with anger, what would *they* say?
- Most of you have been victims of road rage. (I know none of you have been perpetrators of road rage, right?)
- So many people say that they don't get angry. I am never filled with rage.
- Because we are clever people, we have learned how to discuss our anger.
- I don't get angry. I might get *frustrated*. But that's just me responding.
- I'm a little *annoyed* with them right now.
- They are so *irritating*.
- If you're a little cultured, you might be *vexed* with someone.
- If it's really bad, I might get *exasperated*.
- The problem is that many people picture extroverted anger. The rage that explodes in violence. It is loud, in your face.
- Yet the introverted anger, the silence, moodiness, etc. can be just as intimidating or damaging.
- This week and next we are going to look at a section in James letter that talks about what derails relationships, at what creates conflict and how to deal with it.
- What James says today, if we really get it, can totally change your relationships. It is a concept that is so big that if you can embrace and live and think it, it will save you so much grief and pain.
- It can help you conquer that emotion of anger that does so much damage.

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you?

- If you are following closely, you might think that James is asking the wrong question.
- The question is not *what* causes fights, it's *who* causes fights.
- My mother-in-law did . . .
- My boss is . . .
- If you knew my kids . . .
- Do you know what my husband did? What my wife said?
- As long as you think it's a who, you will never get to the root of the problem.

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.

- Here's the concept that changes everything.
- **THE SOURCE OF YOUR ANGER AND CONFLICT IS INSIDE AND NOT OUTSIDE.**
- That's because:

I. The root of all your anger and conflicts is your desires.

- Whenever I get angry or have relational conflict, there is always something that I want that I am not getting.
- The source of every argument you have ever had is inside.
- You say: "I just want them to get home on time for once." That makes sense. So you want something from them that is not happening.
- "I should get credit for that idea at work. It was mine. I earned it." You are probably right. So what you want is credit? And you are not getting it? Right.
- "No you don't understand. I just want them to show me respect. That's all. I am owed at least that." Given your position, I get get it. Yet you're not getting it.
- "It's just not fair. They just need to treat all of us fairly." So you want fairness. Laudable goal. You're not getting it.
- "They promised." Right . . . and you are not getting what was promised.
- We all have desires and when those desires that you have are not fulfilled, it leads to anger and conflict.
- It seems in v2 like James is being a big hyperbolic.
- Yes . . . and no.
- When you desires are not fulfilled, and it leads to anger (or whatever word you want to use), James is simply saying that anger, unchecked, has the potential for tremendous damage in our lives.
- If you don't recognize that the source of root if in here and not "out there", you will carry the potential to take things to an unhealthy, destructive extreme.
- The source of conflict and anger is NOT from their inability to see the world the way I DO. It's in ME. It's my desires.
- I simply cannot tell you how much letting this truth sink in to your heart will change your life and relationships.
- As long as you think it's *them*, you have an excuse not to control you.
- Of course unfairness, broken promises, should upset you, but wise people see that part of the problem is my wants.
- Conflict shakes us up and what is in comes out.
- The solution is NOT to never be shaken. It's to let God change what is inside.
- **THE SOURCE OF YOUR ANGER AND CONFLICT IS INSIDE AND NOT OUTSIDE.**
- What's inside of you is coming for you and its coming for the people around you.
- The problem James is addressing is this:

II. We have made others the focus of our desires instead of God.

You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

- There are two parts to this problem.
 - First, we have put the solution to our conflict problems in others. If only THEY treated me right. If only THEY were fair. If only THEY did what they promised. If only THEY acted with respect and consideration.
 - We have demanded from others and when those desires have not been fulfilled we get angry and have conflict.
 - James says that logical first step is to go to God and not demand from others.
 - But this is where run run into the second problem.
 - When we finally go to God, it is to get him to fix the situation so I can get what I desire. If they won't give it to me, maybe God can make it happen.
 - They are not praying altruistically, but intensively for their own wants and desires.
 - *"Prayer is not best described as accessing God but as being accessed by God. It is not about power but about submission. It is not about requesting but submitting."* (John: Exegetical Commentary)
 - Although not the focus here, this speaks directly to the health and wealth gospel. You cannot manipulate God into getting what you want for your own selfish pleasure.
 - Once again, the issue is not that we desire rightness, credit, fairness, etc. It is the selfish orientation of our hearts.
 - We have set our affections on the wrong thing.
 - He calls them adulterous people. Strong term. Those in the church (bride of Christ) are being unfaithful to their groom.
 - I notice a couple of things:
 - One, we cannot be a friend with the world and God. The term for friendship is a serious one, with shared loyalties and values. It means choosing that our first love is the world and its value system.
 - Two, it is a choice. It is not an accident. You are not a victim. You do not have to react a certain way. You get to choose.
 - Verse 5 has a difficult phraseology, but it connects to the idea (from Exodus 20) that God is jealous God in that he desires for people to turn to him. He knows it is for the best. He understands what happens when our affections are misplaced.
 - Jame then makes this interesting statement.
- 6 But he gives us more grace.*
- God is always willing to deal with us if we come to him.
 - He gives his grace. He is ever willing to give us increasing amounts of his grace.
 - He will strengthen us to deal with our unmet desires. He will help us see the situation differently. He will work in us so that anger is not our master.
 - But there is a catch.
- That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*
- **THE SOURCE OF YOUR ANGER AND CONFLICT IS INSIDE AND NOT OUTSIDE.**

III. Humility is required to look honestly within.

- Many believe James is paraphrasing from Proverbs 3:34
34 He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.
- Humility makes sense – arrogance makes no sense.
- Thinking you are right and they are wrong. Rejecting the input of others. Figuring others need to change but you are fine – it doesn't even make sense.
- That's why this section is connected to what he had just written.
- The truth is simply that people who lack wisdom lack humility, and people who lack humility lack wisdom.
- You cannot be wise and arrogant.
- What should give us pause is not simply that arrogance is illogical and counterproductive, but God is opposed to the proud.
- Why is this so important?
- Because it takes humility, when we don't get what we are promised, when things aren't fair, when they take advantage of us, when we aren't shown respect, to look inside at the desires we have that aren't being met and deal with our own stuff first.

ILLUSTRATION

Biggest struggle for me. When I was wronged. When I thought I was in the right. When I thought the people I was leading were not treating me right. To accept that I had to look into the desires I had that were not being met. Desires for affirmation. For approval. For success.

- When you do this, this is the huge expression of humility and God loves this.
- He treats those people with favor. God gives gifts that are truly worth having. The one who is humble enough to seek and depend on God gets God's gifts.

- Come back to the original question – what is your relationship with anger? How does it play into your relationships?
- Is your anger more prevalent in relation to a particular relationship? Maybe just with certain types of people? Maybe in certain environments?
- Do you want to put an end to the anger in your life? Do you want to stop it from controlling your mouth? Your mood? Do you want to see relationships be increasingly life giving?
- When conflict shakes you up, what do you desire to come out?
- But when you own your desires, your temperature, the temperature, in any situation comes down.
- When you own your own desires and look at how you are looking for others to meet them instead of Jesus, it will give you a completely different perspective.
- That is going to take humility as you look inside.
- Jesus is in charge and he did not get everything he wanted either.
- He said no to himself so he could give you what you needed.

Phil 2:6 Who, being in very nature God,

- He was God. He deserved everything. He was owed respect. Everything and everyone should have given him everything. Their all. He not only deserved it, he could get it. He had the winning argument in every situation. He was never wrong. He never had to own his piece of the conflict. Yet:

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself

- When Jesus did not get what he wanted, he did not "power up." He did not press in to crush the people around him. What did he do? He humbled himself.
by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

- Rather than claim what was owed, he allowed death. Because the relationship with you was more important than winning and argument.
- Paul, who wrote these words, said, "Have the same mindset as Jesus."
- It's better not to get what you earned/deserve/were promised than to let anger wreck your relationships.
- So the next time you feel yourself getting enraged, frustrated, irritated or angry, stop. Be wise. Be humble. Look inside at your desires. Ask Jesus to point out what you want that you are not getting. Then own your desires. Bring them to Jesus and give them to him.
- Then you can live and rest in the grace and favor of your heavenly Father.