

FAITH WORKS – FAITH PRAYS

June 25 – Randy Eliason

James 4:1-3

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.

In these verses James first identifies the problem: God's people, believe it or not, were in conflict with one another. Later in this chapter he instructs them not to speak against one another and in chapter 5 he says not to complain against one another.

So apparently the Christians to whom James was writing had some problems with one another. They were experiencing external conflict.

But James drills down deeper and reveals a more significant problem. It is the undetected, underlying problem that is the root cause of the more obvious problem. It is the problem of internal unrest. It is the problem of lust and envy and greed. It is the problem of frustration and dissatisfaction resulting from unfulfilled desires. This internal frustration from unsatisfied desires has caused external conflicts among God's people.

Then James goes deeper and reveals the reason for the internal unrest; He identifies why they are dissatisfied, discontent, frustrated?

They are frustrated from unmet needs and unfulfilled desires because:

1. They failed to ask God! *"You do not have, because you do not ask."*

What we do when we have unmet needs and unfulfilled desires reveals a lot about our faith, or lack of faith?

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A.. Do we become determined to meet our own needs and desires on our own? If so, then our faith is in ourselves.

B. Do we attack and blame others? If so, we demonstrate that our faith is in people, believing that they control our lives and bear responsibility for our contentment. If you have legitimate needs and appropriate desires, but go to a source that is not capable of meeting those needs and desires, you will be frustrated. Too many people live with the false expectation that individuals and institutions are both obligated and able to meet their needs. We have severely overestimated the goodness and abilities of others. We too often fail to recognize the limits of our own ability, the limits of the abilities of friends and families, and the abilities of govt.

C. Or do we go to God? If we believe that God is our ultimate source of provision and contentment, then that belief will manifest itself by taking everything to God in prayer.

When things don't go the way we want; when we don't get what we want; there are three ways we can respond. We can panic, we can pout, or we can pray. One day I was praying about the lack of peace and contentment that Christians, including myself, often exhibit. The Lord showed me a picture of a little boy who had just received a new toy. As he was playing with it the pieces came apart. He tried to put them together but he couldn't. He tried to fix it on his own but became extremely frustrated when his attempts to reassemble the toy continually failed. He started crying and cursing the toy. His father, overhearing his son's cries went to his room to see what was happening. When he entered his son's room and saw his sons toy in

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pieces and his son in pieces emotionally, He said, “Why didn’t you call me?” Instead of going to God, we try and put the broken pieces of our lives back together on our own. When we can’t fix it we get frustrated and irritated. Our Father is able and willing to meet our needs but we must ask?

Hebrews 11:6 says, “And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.”

This verse describes the obvious. Prayer is the evidence of faith. You will not go to God for help if you don’t first believe that he exists, and second that he will actually hear and respond to your prayers. Where there is faith in God there will be prayer to God. Where there is not prayer, there is no real faith. Just as James said in chapter 2 that faith without works is dead, it is equally true that faith without prayer is dead. Prayer is one action that necessarily results from faith. So James identifies their initial problem: By their failure to go to God in prayer they gave evidence to their lack faith in God as the one who could meet their unmet needs and satisfy their unfulfilled desires.

But their failure to go to God in prayer wasn’t their only failure. There was a second reason for their problem:

2. They prayed for the wrong things.

Even when they did pray, their needs were still unmet and their desires were still unfulfilled because their praying was corrupt. James wrote, “And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.”

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They were looking for satisfaction, contentment, and fulfillment in all the wrong places. Possessions, Pleasure, Positions. Stuff, Status, Sensuality. It bears repeating over and over again: These three make big promises but they never deliver on their promises, because they can't deliver.

Possessions won't bring ultimate contentment.

Eric Quiones in an online Princeton News article on June 29, 2006 wrote, "While most people believe that having more income would make them happier, Princeton University researchers have found that the link is greatly exaggerated and mostly an illusion."

Pleasures won't bring ultimate contentment. We are a pleasure driven society that multiplies its addictions daily. The number of people that are in some kind of recovery program for addictions to drugs, alcohol, pornography, gaming, etc. is staggering.

Popularity won't bring ultimate contentment.

In His book, King's Cross, Tim Keller cites an article by Cynthia Heimel, written in the Village Voice, a publication out of the artsy East Village in NYC. Cynthia had met a number of aspiring actors and actresses who attained their goals. In quoting her, Keller writes, "I pity [celebrities]. No, I do. [Celebrities] were once perfectly pleasant human beings...but now...their wrath is awful...More than any of us, they wanted fame. They worked, they pushed...The morning after...each of them became famous, they wanted to take an overdose...because that giant thing they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything okay, that was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to provide them with personal

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fulfillment and happiness, had happened. And nothing changed. They were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable.”¹

What should we go to God for? We should ask Him for everything we need. This includes material needs as well as our emotional, mental, relational & spiritual needs. God’s promise to provide for the needs of His people is firmly established in both the OT and NT. God is our provider, yes He is! He is the provider of what we need and what is good for us. I will be frustrated if I am expecting God to provide things for me that are not what I need. Jesus is willing and able to meet my need, not my greed. We can get these two confused. This last week I discovered a need you didn’t know I had. I found myself thinking, “I need an in ground swimming pool.” I could pray for that, but that would be a waste of my words in light of all the things I really need from God! I need faith, courage, joy, love, wisdom, guidance, discipline, strength and health.

In 5:13-15 James writes, “Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well.”

But before you seek His hand, seek His face!

First of all, we pray not for the things he can provide, but for Him!!! In 4:4 James wrote, You adulterers! Don’t you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be

¹ Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2011) p. 29

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a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God. In verse 8 he wrote, “Draw near to God and he will draw close to you.” The expression “draw near” to God was language reminiscent of the priests in the OT drawing near to God in worship. The most fundamental, essential, supreme benefit we derive from prayer is prayer itself. Communion with God is not just a means to an end, it is an end in itself. The greatest benefit any of us receive from prayer is the benefit of pure fellowship with the Holy Spirit. My boys have always been welcome to ask me for anything they need. It is my joy to meet their needs. But what I love most is when they want to talk with me just because they desire interaction with their dad.

St Augustine said it well in his famous quote, “God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.

If Jesus is merely a tool that you find useful, and not a treasure you find beautiful, then you have missed Him! He is not a treasure map that points to the treasure, He is the treasure. He is not a treasure chest that contains the treasure, He is the treasure! God help us if we treat the almighty, marvelous, glorious, gracious, creator, savior, redeemer as a tool that is merely useful for us, rather than cherish Him as a treasure that is beautiful to us.

In His book, *Deliver Us From Evil*, Ravi Zacharias writes, “There is an ancient Eastern parable titled “The Wealth Is Nearer to You Than You Think”. It tells of a wealthy merchant who had undertaken a lengthy journey, carrying with him his most valuable jewels. Along the way, another traveler befriended him, making it look like a chance meeting but with the sole intent of laying his hands on those precious stones. At the end of each day when they arrived at a local inn they would share the room for the night. As was customary, each received

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his mat and pillow and also a wash basin with a towel for his nightly ablutions. The merchant, somewhat suspicious of his newfound friend's real motives, devised a scheme to safeguard his valuables that was to leave his ill-intentioned companion completely befuddled. Before they turned in for the night, he would graciously offer the would-be thief the privilege of washing up first. As soon as the thief would leave the room, the rich man would take his bag full of precious stones and hastily hide it under the pillow of the thief. When the thief would return, the rich man would make his exit, taking his turn at cleaning up. Awaiting this moment of opportunity, with predatorial glee the rogue would plunge into the rich man's belongings, rummaging through his bag, even ransacking in and under the rich man's pillow, feverishly searching for the precious stones. His frenzied and fruitless attempts at every stop left him utterly frustrated, and eventually he would lay his sleepless head on his pillow, angry at his failure to locate the treasure.

Finally, as it came time to part on their last day together, the rich man began his farewell pleasantries and, to the speechless astonishment of his companion, informed him that all along he had been painfully aware of his real motives. Then came the agony-inflicting revelation: – You poured all your energies into looking everywhere – except under your own pillow. The wealth was nearer to you than you realized.”²

The wealth is nearer than you think. True wealth; the peace of the Holy Spirit, His power, His joy, His love, His wisdom, His strength is right here for us if we draw near to God.

² Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil: Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1996), p. 3.