



Ed Miller
July 10, 2016

JAMES 4:1-6

Wow. I'm coming Saturday night. Who's joining me? I'm coming. That was a great challenge. I say wow as well because I don't know about you, but my heart has been really heavy the last few days. So much has happened this last week, it's been amazing. This morning in *The Trenton Times* – "America is Weeping." America is weeping. Wow.

I'm not going to spend much time on it because you know. You've heard what's going on. But let me just review some of the things that we need to be praying about. There are personal things going on in our lives. Each of us could tell a story about something that we're burdened with, some pain, some evil that we're facing, we're challenged by.

There are horrible things happening in the world. There are mass bombings. There are individual bombings in the Middle East, in Baghdad, in Turkey. There's just horrible things. There's famine. There's poverty happening in the world. We know most probably about the shootings. Police are being assassinated. There are people that are very afraid when they're pulled over by the police. There's a lot of poverty, there's drugs, broken families, gang related situations in our cities. Just down the road here in Trenton and across this country there's a lot. There are refugees all over the world. There's disease. There's famine. And again, as I mentioned, there are personal issues.

My son, Dave, is married to Amanda, as you know. They're on vacation this week. Amanda's brother is a state trooper in Pennsylvania. She's afraid for her brother every day. There are others of us here in the room who know or are in law enforcement or in the military. There's a lot of stuff going on today. There's a lot of things.

Now I tend to be the kind of person by personality in my flesh that just wishes it went away. I just wish it would disappear. I want to bury my head in the sand and say, "I just don't want to think about that." I want to forget about it.

We look through history and there have been worse things that have happened in the world that are happening now. The question that all of us have to deal with (is what Fred and Dan encouraged us to do, really) is where do we turn? Where do we find our hope when things are the way they are, when there's such insecurity? And how do we help our young people and our children? How do we help them deal with what's going on in the world? Burying our heads in the sand is not the answer.

Have compassion. I think it's good that I felt the pain of so many who have lost loved ones. So much of what's going on there's a lot of pain. To feel that pain and to weep with those who weep, it's a good thing.

We're going to get to James this morning, which is what I preach out of. Before we do though, I want to read a passage to you that God really put on my heart from Ephesians, another one of Paul's writings. Ephesians 6. We usually go to the armor of God section, but I'm going to read in the earlier section, 6:10. This is the ending of Paul's letter in his letter to the Ephesians. He says – *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* Be strong in the Lord.

Another passage that's similar that's been on my mind a lot is – *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.* Focus on the Lord. Bring our concerns, our anxieties, our cares to the Lord.

I'm preaching to myself this morning as much as I'm preaching to anybody because I need it. All week I've been wrestling with this because God's been speaking to me. "Ed, what are you doing? Are you being strong in the Lord? Or are you trying to find some other way to cope and get through?" Frankly, I'm challenged. I need to be strong in the Lord and believe in God's mighty power. And friends, He is powerful.

We can feel like this world is out of control, can't we? We can just feel like it's so out of control. Where is God? We're just not looking in the right places because every one of these situations that I mentioned, God is at work. There are godly people doing wonderful things in Dallas, in the Middle East, in Iran. All over the world people are doing great things. People are coming to the Lord. The name of the Lord is being proclaimed. But we need to be strong. We need to be the examples in our communities. We live in different communities, but we need to be strong.

It's not an accident that we've come to a place in James in my preaching that really deals with this. Nor is it an accident that Scott and Joanne had planned to go to Dallas this week. Isn't that something? Just two good examples of how God works.

Scott and Joanne are going to Dallas where there's a lot of pain, there's a lot of struggle right now. I have friends in Dallas and I know they're hurting. I know there are people around the world that are hurting. There's all kinds of protests happening. There's a lot of hurting going on. But they're going to Dallas. They're going to be with families and they're going to be ministering to them.

I want to pray for them that God would use them. I'm going to pray for each of you again. We're not going to do an hour of prayer this morning. We're going to spend more time in the word. But I want to pray for us again that God would speak to each of us and allow us to be strong in His mighty power. No matter what you're facing, no matter what you're feeling about what's going on, that you would be strong and that I would be too. So let's pray again.

[PRAYER] Lord, we weep. We weep as we see the pain, the hurt, the evil. We weep as we see things unfolding in our world and in our families and in our lives. We weep. We mourn. We ask, Lord, what are you doing? Lord, we ask for your help now that you would help us to be strong in

you and in your mighty power. To put on the full armor of God. To pray, to be in your word, to fellowship, to spend time with other believers. Help us, Father, each one of us. I particularly pray for Scott and Joanne as they're on their way to Dallas and as they'll be ministering to families in Dallas who are questioning, and dealing, and may be fearful, and trying to help their kids understand how to deal with tragedy and difficult things. Lord, would you use them these next few days as they minister. It's not an accident. You've called them there for such a time as this. And now would you teach us out of your word. Teach us how to be strong in your mighty power. Help us to examine our hearts and our lives and what we should be doing. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

If you have your Bible, turn to James. We're in James 4. Before we do, let me review. Since we don't go to James that often, sometimes we need to review certain things. This morning I want to review one thing about James that I think is particularly appropriate. You'll remember that James in chapter 1 makes it very clear to us that he is speaking to the church that's been scattered. The early church had been scattered by persecution. They knew what it was like to deal with difficulty.

In fact we read in Acts 8:1-3, here's what was happening: *And Saul approved of their killing him. They were talking about the stoning of Stephen in that situation. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

This is the context that James is speaking about. He's speaking of a context of tragedy. A context where the church is threatened. The church is under attack and they've been scattered. They're fearful for their lives.

I'm going to read a fairly lengthy section of chapter 4. We're not actually going to talk about all of it, but I want to read this whole section. James 4:1-12. I'm going to be speaking again in August, so in about a month we'll get to the second part of it. We're just going to deal with the first part, but let's listen to the whole section.

James 4:1-12 – What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

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. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

Dan mentioned that he didn't want to get too heavy. But this is heavy. This is real heavy. This is a difficult teaching. It's a challenging teaching. It could be viewed as a very negative teaching. I don't see it that way. I see it as very positive one. But before we get to the positive, we have to do some examining.

God causes us to examine ourselves. He challenges us. That's what I've been doing a lot this week is examining myself. We're going to examine three questions. We're going to look at three questions from this passage. Again, just the first part. Three questions that we each need to answer.

That first question is, what is fighting really all about? The first part of this passage James speaks about fighting and quarrelling. He asked the question, *What causes fights and quarrels among you?* Just ponder that for a minute. What is it that causes fighting and quarrelling?

There's a lot of fighting and quarrelling going on out in public today in the world. We have fighting and quarrelling in our own families, don't we. We fight and quarrel with our spouses. We fight and quarrel with our kids. Our kids fight and quarrel among themselves. There's a lot of fighting and quarreling. Why do we fight and quarrel?

I think James answers that for us. It's at the very core our selfish desires. Those of us who are Christians, we've given our lives to Jesus, but that doesn't mean those selfish desires are not still there. We do battle with those selfish desires, which is why we need to be strong in the Lord. Because those desires are real. They're there. If they're left unchecked, if they're not examined, those personal desires can grow to dominate and rule our actions. Selfish desires.

What personal desires, what are the ones that get you into trouble? For me what gets me into trouble is that I want to be liked. I like it when people say nice things about me. I like it when people feel good about me and tell me how much they appreciate me. I'm a feeler. I feel things. I'm not as much of a truth teller. And part of the reason is because that's the way God made me. But part of the reason is that I don't tell the truth because I want people to like me. And when you tell the truth, somebody's not going to like you. In fact oftentimes when you tell the truth, people aren't going to like you. In fact maybe many people aren't going to like you. Truth telling is hard for me. But you know what, God continually challenges me that it's my selfishness that keeps me from telling the truth.

At the heart of it, I want to be liked more than I want to be faithful to God sometimes. I want to be liked or I want to feel good about myself because that's a selfish desire. That is my selfish desire.

What is it for you? What's the selfishness in your heart that causes you to argue or fight with others? When we have those selfish desires and we don't get what we want, we tend to focus on the other person. "Oh they did that to me, they did this to me." We're hurt. We may be hurt. But we focus on the hurt and the pain that others are doing to me, to us. We blame them. So that's why we argue and fight and quarrel. We tend to focus more on the other person. We don't put ourselves in their place. We just feel our pain. We feel our struggle.

I had a situation at one point where I had someone that just absolutely hated me. I didn't quite know what to do with this. It was because I was a truth teller. I told the truth in this situation. At the time, I was the president of Lawrence Little League. For those of you who know me, I've coached baseball most of my life. I was the president of Lawrence Little League and I did not allow a certain person to be a coach on one of our all-star teams. For one whole year he made it his personal goal to destroy me.

I did not know what to do about this. That was so foreign to me. I don't think I had ever experienced someone really hating me. You may say, "You've lived a very protective life, Ed." Well actually, yeah, you're right. I think I have. I've been very blessed. But this knocked me off my feet. Again I had to think about what's going on here? This guy was fighting because he didn't get what he wanted. He wanted to be in a key role in our league and he didn't get it, so he took it out on me. He blamed me. I had to decide what I was going to do. Was I going to use my selfish motivation for feeling good to treat him badly back, or what was I going to do? We all have faced or face something like that.

When our kids get in disputes with each other don't they often say, "Well it's his problem" or "it's her problem." "She hit me." "She did something to me." "She was mean to me." "He was mean to me." So we get in fights and argue. But it all comes down to selfishness, self-focus.

When I talk to parents I often talk about the concept of honor, which is something we talk about a lot in the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Honor deals with selfishness by causing us to focus on other people. One of the ways that we get out of our selfishness is we focus on other people and look at life from their perspective. We need to do that.

In these kinds of situations with the police, do we look at the situation from the life of what it would be like to be in law enforcement and have your life threatened? Do we look at what it's like for a person of color to be fearful when they're pulled over? Both of those things are real fears. There's some serious issues going on. Do we put ourselves in the place of others and try to understand what they're feeling?

People that are hurt hurt others. People that are hurt hurt others. There's a lot of people that are hurt today. An awful lot of people that are hurt today and they lash out. Do we do the same thing or do we try to see things from a different perspective?

In the public realm there's a lot of finger-pointing, a lot of blaming. It's not a very fun time in the world of politics right now. It's just a lot of negativity, negativity, negativity. It's a very negative phase that we're in right now. A lot of finger-pointing and a lot of blaming.

I think it's very sad that a lot of things are being blamed on our police right now that are not really the problem with the police. If you're not praying for the police in your local town or police that you know, please pray for them. Their life is difficult right now. They're not getting a lot of support. Their life is difficult. Pray for them. I'm sorry, I just feel the pain right now that a lot of people are feeling in the world.

In James I think we harken back to chapter 1:14 where James says we're *tempted when we are dragged away by our own sinful desire*.

I don't usually quote outside sources, but I'm going to do it this time. I'm going to quote the Roman orator, Cicero because it's extremely appropriate. Cicero is quoted as saying this: "It is insatiable desires which overturn not only individual man, but whole families, and which even bring down the state. From desires there spring hatred, schisms, discords, seditions, and wars." That's brutal stuff. And it all comes from our insatiable desires.

A lot of people run for public office because they have an insatiable desire to be in power, to have power, and to have people love them, to have people look at them. A lot of people go into it for the wrong reasons. There are some of our public servants who do it for the right reasons, but many don't. Many of us have to examine our own motives and look at why we do what we do. Do we do it for personal gain? Do we do it for personal pleasure? Do we do it because we want others to like us?

Again, I ask you to reflect. What personal issue in your life, what personal desire is it that God would want you to turn away from and turn to Him and be strong in Him.

Question number two – how do those desires lead us to fighting? How do we do that? I've already gotten into that a little bit. But the words are we can't get what we want, James says, *so we kill*. That's a very strong word. The Greek word there is *phonos* and it can literally be translated murder. But it can also have a more of a metaphorical meaning similar to character assassination where we just try to destroy people's credibility.

You know sometimes selfish desires cause us to kill. We get so angry. People get so angry. Again, they've been hurt, they've been wounded, and their own evil desire can cause them to kill. We're seeing a lot of actual killing. But we can also do it in a way that's demeaning to people. It's not actually killing them; it's killing their reputation.

I think we make one of two mistakes. James reveals to us one of two possible mistakes. When we have the stirrings of temptation towards sin, towards selfishness, we don't turn to God. We don't submit to God and His word. We don't pray. We just let those lusts, those desires go and have their way with us.

I have had that happen in my life where I've allowed anger to take over me. And you know what happens when anger takes over you? You lose your mind. You literally lose your mind. Your mind is not in control anymore and those emotions are strong and powerful and they can carry you away. You say things and do things that you'd like to take back because you don't really mean it.

But he also says another thing can happen. Even when we do turn to God, when we do pray, we come to Him with the wrong posture. We ask God with wrong motives. This is the approach of looking at God kind of like a vending machine. We pray and expect Him to give us what we want. So we ask God for what we want. That's where James is saying we ask with wrong motives. We pray and we expect Him to give us what we want. So then we wonder why God doesn't give us what we ask for. Because that's not how God operates. He doesn't give us what we ask for sometimes because we're asking for the wrong thing. Our motives are selfish. We need to ask God if our motives are right. So we need to examine ourselves again. There's a choice to be made.

The third question that we have – what is it that's going wrong? What is it that's going wrong? Well what's going wrong is we have a choice to make. And now we're getting into verse 4, if you're following along.

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. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

I thought a lot about this idea of friendship with the world. I think that's maybe what I wrestled with the most this week. What does it mean to be a friend of the world, as opposed to a friend of God? What does it mean?

At the very core, I think friendship with the world means we value ourselves or the opinion of others more than we value God Himself. We value the world's way of looking at things more than we value God. We put those things higher. It may be material things. We value material things more highly than we do God Himself. Or for me maybe I value feeling good about myself more highly than I ought. Well that's the way the world functions, right?

The movie *Wall Street*, a famous phrase from there is "greed is good." There's a lot of greed in the world. A lot of people see greed as being good and selfishness as being good. That's friendship with the world. A lot of times we value those things that we have materially, or even our relationships we value them so much that we don't put God in His right place on the throne of our lives.

The last time I preached we talked about relativism and Scott talked about tolerance a couple weeks ago. That is a prevailing mindset in our world today. That we should just tolerate everything, and everything is equal, everything is relative. Nothing's really true anymore. It's a

prevailing philosophy in our day today. To adhere to that philosophy is also to be a friend of the world. To be friends with the world, James says, is to be *at enmity with God*.

What's the answer? What's the solution? The solution is to be friends with God and to be humble before God. To turn to God with a genuine heart and want to serve God alone. That's the answer. Isn't it?

I started out with that passage in Ephesians and I started out encouraging us to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. God gives grace to the humble and He resists the proud. If we're proud and, at worse, selfish, we're not going to be God's friend. We're going to be a friend of the world. If we're going to be God's friend, we're going to need to be strong in Him and in His mighty power. In prayer we're going to need to pray together like never before. We're going to need to be in His word like never before.

That is a challenging message for us. There's no doubt that that's a challenging message. The hope is that God says He will give it to us. He will give us more grace. Because He is powerful. He is strong. When we turn to Him, we don't have to be afraid. We do have to examine ourselves. We have to examine our motives. We have to understand what's going on in our hearts. And that takes courage.

Fred challenged the men. He challenged us to be courageous and to walk with him and walk together around our neighborhoods. We're going to be going to Fred's neighborhood, if I'm not mistaken, this week. Saturday night we're going to be walking around that neighborhood and claiming that neighborhood in Hamilton.

We need to be courageous. We need to examine our selfishness, examine our motives. But God will give us the grace that we need. God will give us the strength that we need if we will only turn to Him and not be afraid. There is nothing happening in the world that God is not aware of. There's nothing happening in your life that God doesn't know about, care about deeply. There's no fear, there's no challenge too great. I'm speaking to myself again as well. There's nothing that's too great that God can't handle and God can't give us what we need, the grace and the strength that we need.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we weep with those who weep. We weep with those who struggle. We weep with those who are hurting and who are fearful. We weep for those in the world, in Dallas, and our country, and in our families, and in this community, and in our communities. We weep. Father, we also open our hearts to you and say where is it that we're too much in line with the world's view, too friendly to the world? Where is it that we're letting our personal selfishness or our personal peace cause us not to seek you, or cause us to fight and quarrel with others? Lord, help us. Help us to be strong in your grace and strong in your mighty power, turning to you and being willing to listen to you and respond to you. We ask for your help, Lord. You are powerful. You are strong. There is nothing we have to fear. Help us believe that. Help our unbelief. We want to be people that are faithful to you, full of your Spirit and full of your grace. Help us to be strong in your mighty power. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.