

James

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
February 1, 2023



James 4:1-7

Vss. 1-3

- James here shifts to address another key cancer that permeated the Church of James' time and does so still today. Here's the question: Do our life's priorities have Jesus Christ and His Way at the top or is the World and its pleasures at the top? This was the choice Satan offered Jesus in Luke 4:5-8 (read). Here Satan is offering Jesus one of the World's greatest prizes - power...power and all that goes with it. How many good and godly people have been compromised by giving in to the temptation of power? It was the Englishman, Lord Acton, who is credited with first saying that, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely".
- And then, there are all the good things that God has given that a sinful world has taken and twisted and abused. Food, clothing, drink, sex, marriage, friendship, family, and more are all the good gifts of God found in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. But food has become both gluttony and bulimia. Clothing has created an economic division with \$3,000 shoes and \$2,000 handbags. And drink? Alcoholism is a far greater affliction on the world than cocaine or fentanyl will ever be.
- So James asks the Church rhetorically, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Because the people of the Church, regardless of whether they are Jew or Greek or Roman or whatever, cannot keep the 10th Commandment against coveting, then envy and lust is the result and these so easily leads to violence.
- Recall Jesus' Parable of the Sower and how there were seeds that fell into the thorns, which Jesus explains in Luke 8:14, "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity." I have personally known hundreds of these people. They come to church now and then, they'll say they enjoyed the sermon and the service, but they never commit to The Way. That which they value most lies elsewhere. In the choice between pleasing God and pleasing themselves, the people of the thorns have long settled that question.

- Finally, these people understand enough that God **can** give all that they ask for, but because their hearts are not right they ask with the wrong motives, intending to misspend what God has given them and when they don't get it handed to them from God, these people often do terrible things to attain what they desire. CS Lewis, in his book "The Great Divorce", said, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened."

Vss. 4-7

- Here James goes back to his Jewish roots, to the book of Hosea and the other prophets. Recall that Hosea's life was a parable where he played the role of God and his wife, who was a prostitute, played the role of Israel. While God the husband was forever faithful, the harlot wife Israel was forever chasing after other lovers. You find the same sentiment in Jeremiah 3:20, "Surely as a woman treacherously departs from her lover, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel", says the Lord".
- James goes on to make the point that we cannot have it both ways: if you make yourself a friend to the world then you are making yourself an enemy of God. Now again, this is understanding the Greek word "*kosmos*" in the right context. Here, "the world" is not that which "for God so loved" but rather a godless place, determined to achieve self-rule. It is the same context in which Paul writes to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:10) "Demas, in love with the present world, has deserted me." It carries the same meaning here as Paul uses the word "flesh" in Romans 8:7-8, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God;...those who are in the flesh cannot please God".
- In the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 6:24), Jesus tells us that "No one can serve two Masters". Either Christ is our Way or we go the way of the world. Either Christ is our Master or we serve another master, usually finding some way to make ourselves our own master...or so we think.
- Vs. 5 is a bit tough to translate. There are multiple ways to lay out the sentence, but in the end only one real meaning: Our God is a jealous God who will not tolerate a rival. We laugh at the ancient pagans and their silly stone idols, but in our lives, whenever we replace God as our supreme priority, we have created a god to put in place before Him. This God will not tolerate. God loves each of us as if we were each the only one on earth to love. "For God so loved YOU that He gave His only begotten Son." A love that strong will not tolerate a rival.

- So how do we live as God's faithful bride? On our own we will fail, but God gives us the grace we need to live the life Christ has called us to live. We can love our enemy only by the grace of God. We can turn the other cheek only by the grace of God. It is when we finally realize that we are sinners in need of God's grace that we can receive His grace and grace will be added to grace to give us what we need to live the Christ-like life.
- It is when we humble ourselves in this way and admit our weakness that God's grace is poured out greater and greater. James quotes Proverbs 3:34 (as does Peter in 1 Peter 5:5), which basically says that the proud will try to get through on their own strength, but God's power is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), and He gives sufficient grace to the humble.
- This humility, whereby we submit ourselves to the Lord's authority, does not as weak things. As the same strength that filled Christ as He faced the cross fills us, we learn that through humility and submission to Him we have become invincible. One of the early church Fathers was known as The Shepherd of Hermas. He once wrote that, "The devil can wrestle against the Christian, but he cannot throw him". You see the same truth in 1 Peter 5:8-9. The Christian can walk with confidence then knowing that it is never their own strength they must depend on, but the strength that comes to us through God's amazing grace. The way to Almighty God is open to us and the love flows both ways.