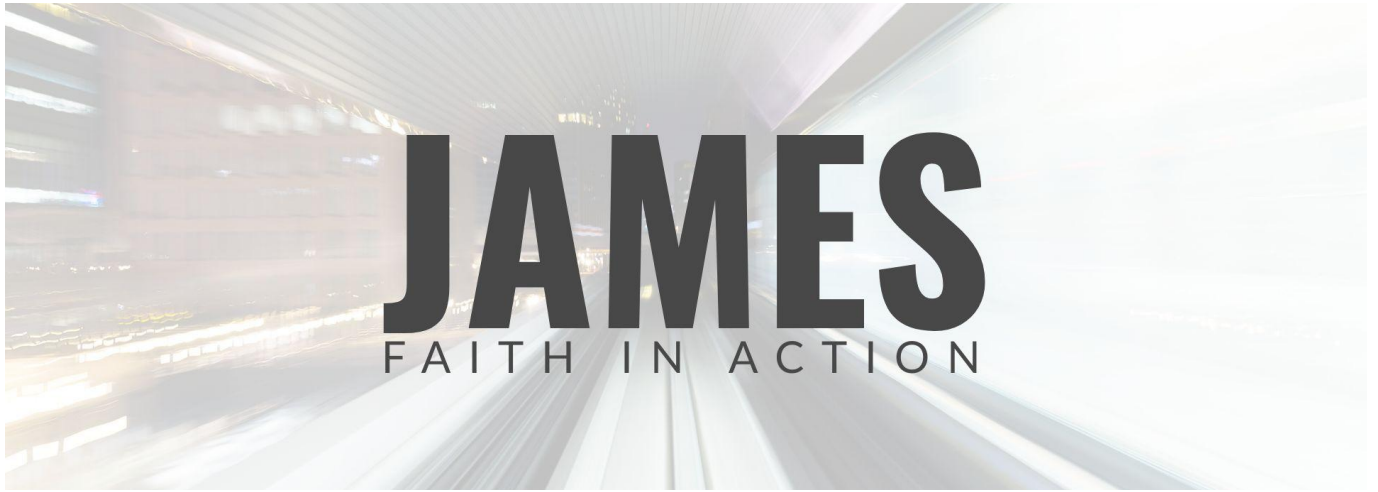




JAMES - Faith in Action

Real Faith is Humble (7/9)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT: After looking at James 3, what's one way you want to let God shape your words or your wisdom this week?

Warm-Up

1. What's one thing that you're really particular about in day to day life?

Read James 4:1-3

2. What does James say is at the root of fights and quarrels among believers?
3. Where do you see "passions at war" in your own life—things you want that sometimes clash with others or with God?
4. How does James link wrong desires to unanswered prayer in verses 2–3?
5. Have you seen selfish ambition or pride cause conflict in churches, families, or workplaces?

Read James 4:4-5

6. In verse 4, James uses the language of "adultery." Why do you think he chooses such a strong image?
7. What does it mean to be "a friend of the world" in this passage?
8. How does God's jealousy (v.5) differ from human jealousy? How might it actually be good news?
9. How do you react when you read these verses? Why are fights, quarrels, and friendship with the world so bad for God's church?

Read James 4:6-10

10. What do you think of these verses? Any initial thoughts, questions, or observations?
11. Verse 6 - Why is pride such a barrier to receiving God's grace?
12. What encouragement do you see in verses 6–10 for those who humble themselves before God?
13. What do you find most challenging about James' call to "submit to God" and "resist the devil"?
14. James promises, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." What practices help you do this?
15. How might our church look different if humility and grace shaped all our relationships?
16. Think of a recent conflict you've seen. How could humility have changed the outcome?
17. James calls us to "cleanse our hands and purify our hearts." What might that look like in day-to-day life?

APPLY: What's one practical step you can take to humble yourself before God?

PRAY: *Gracious God, thank you for your amazing grace that meets us in our weakness. Forgive us for our pride and selfishness. Help us to humble ourselves before You, resist temptation, and draw near to you. Shape our church with humility and love, that Christ may be glorified. Amen.*

TITLE: Real Faith - is Humble

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: As we submit ourselves to and draw near to God, we will know of his Grace, and be drawn away from the world

STRUCTURE:

- 1-4 - The Church at War
- 4-5 - the Jealousy of God
- 6-10 - The Amazing Grace of God

- Last week in Chapter 3 we saw James talk about the tongue. How it is a restless evil. It's powerful and cannot be tamed by a human! That it was only through humility that God can tame it
- And we also saw James laying out that Godly wisdom always leads to humility.
- The wisdom from the world leads to selfish ambition and jealousy - essentially pride.
- And today - James continues without taking a breath and even ramps up the language even more!
- It seems that all is not well in the early church.
- James addresses people fighting, people hating one another, and more!
- And he lays out the heart of the matter: selfishness and pride.

- **The Church at War**
- 4:1 "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"
- Fights and quarrels come from people desiring the wrong things. People coveting - and having wrongly placed passions!
- He describes the passions among the church at war!
- Instead of the church being passionate about what God wanted, or what's best for God's glory - the people in the church were passionate about other things. And these conflicting desires turned ugly.
- Now sadly - over the past 2000 years of church history, nothing really has changed too much.
- I'm sure if you've been in church for any time, you would have seen peoples passions at war with one another - leading to conflict and quarrels and sometimes fighting.
- There's plenty that people get passionate about:
 - *Worship Styles, the colour of the carpet, the messiness of the kids or youth, the types of seats or pews, the plaques, people sitting in "My Seat", the type of coffee, the colour of the candles, the ringing of the bells, what the minister wears, what plants to plant in the gardens, how bright the lights should be, the temperature of the Aircon*
 - *In fact, I know of a church in the tropics which split because the leaders installed aircon in the church to be welcoming to newcomers! People literally left the church!*
 - How pathetic and pithy and childish our passions can be. How ridiculous to be fighting over such small things.
 - And yes, of course we will all have different preferences and likes, that's okay - good even!
 - It's good that we have differences on the secondary matters - otherwise, we'd just be a boring lot!
 - But when those passions become unchecked or bigger in our heads than God's glory is - we ought to watch out!
 - Conflicting Passions, desires, selfish ambition, jealousy, leads to conflict.
- What leads to infighting in the church? People's pride. People demanding their own way. People not considering others, and people not considering even what God would want.
- James continues:
- V1 "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."
- Wow.

- How do you react when you hear the words of the church at war within itself? Or the words about murder in the church?
 - You might be thinking “Well, that’s a bit strong language here James...maybe he just woke up on the wrong side of the bed that morning...or needed another cup of coffee!”
- But actually - James is being extremely calculated in his words.
- He is dead serious.
 - Now whether there was actual murder - we aren’t sure.
 - This could be James just again using strong metaphor.
 - This is most probably James recalling the words of Jesus on the sermon on the mount where he said that if anyone hates a brother or sister, they have already committed murder in their heart!
- Whatever the situation here - James isn’t pulling his punches!
- James’ words should cause us to recoil and be disgusted at the thought of conflict in the church, because that’s exactly what conflict SHOULD do to us.
- We shouldn’t be content with a church with quarrels and fights. It should cause us to be disgusted!
 - The church is Christ’s bride! Precious! Made Holy. Bought at the price of the high price of Christ’s blood - so what a tragedy it is when the church turns both inwards and downwards - and becomes at war with herself.
 - What a tragedy!
 - How that should grieve us!
 - When there are fights and jealousy and selfish ambition, it should cause us to almost feel physically sick as if people were murdering each other!
- But it’s not just relationship with each other that has gone wrong in the churches - it’s also their relationship with God and their prayer life!
 - V2c “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.”
- When prayer is forgotten completely, or prayer becomes selfish - then its no wonder that churches shrink!
- And when the priorities of the church turns to glorifying themselves or gaining kudos for themselves - it’s no wonder that the prayers go unanswered, people turn away, and people get hurt!
- Can you feel the revolution from James here? Can you see how disgusted James is?
- Do you feel this?
- Good!
 - *Way back in time - the Calder family went on holiday.*
 - *And back at home we had a chest freezer with bread, ice-cream, and bulk meat. It lived in the store-room with carpet in it.*
 - *While we were on holiday, the power went out...but the freezer never turned back on.*
 - *So when we came home and walked in that door - the first thing to hit our noses was the smell of rotting meat.*
 - *It was disgusting. It had to be cleaned up ASAP - otherwise - you couldn’t really live in the place.*
- That feeling of revolution you are feeling now - ought to arise in us when we see the church at war within ourselves.
- And brace yourself - because James continues:
- **The Jealousy of God**
- V4 “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.”
- The picture of an adulterous husband or wife - is vivid. It’s outrageous!
- But it’s used so many times in the Old Testament to describe God’s people’s departure from him!
 - There’s a whole book devoted to describing Israel as an adulterous bride departing from her husband.

- And James uses those images and describes the churches in this way.
- Churches that start to look like the world, or prioritise the world's priorities
 - That is - when the church starts to look no different from everyone else who isn't in the church..and looks the same with fighting, pride, selfishness..
- They are making themselves enemies of the one who saved them.
- Setting themselves up against God himself!
 - Now by friendship - James isn't saying that we can't be friends with non-christians. That would lead to isolating ourselves, which is the opposite of what we are called to do!
 - But by friendship here - James is meaning who we identify with. Who we devote ourselves to and take our lead from.
- And if we take our lead from the people who don't worship or follow God - then we make ourselves enemies of God.
- We are committing adultery against God!
 - When people use the church as a platform for their self importance or to throw their weight around - they are making themselves enemies of God
 - When people in the church quarrel and fight and war over small, pathetic, and pithy things - they are making themselves enemies of God
 - When people use the church to prey on the most vulnerable - they are making themselves enemies of God.
 - When churches disregard the word of God and the teachings of Christ and instead just teach what everyone else says - they are making themselves enemies of God.
 - If we prioritise what the world tells us to prioritise, instead of doing what God tells us to do - we throw God's good news back in his face.
- Even when he still yearns for us and loves us:
 - V5 "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"?"
 - Where this verse comes from - we are at a bit of a loss, but James is going for the 'vibe of the thing' here.
- He made us in his image, he loves us, and he yearns jealousy for us to love him and serve him!
- Like we yearn for our friends to like us, or our children to love us - God yearns for us to come back to him!
- Isn't that enough for us to not be enemies with him!
- And we might be thinking - well Michael, I see this type of thing clearly in other churches, but not here at St John's Wishart Anglican! That'll never be us! We'll never have quarrels or anything like that! We're far better than that!
- Well - actually, while we aren't facing any big conflict - I'm sure that I've at times not been up to scratch. And prioritised my own passions over God's priorities.
- And I think we are having ourselves on if we think that we will never face things like this in our future! Or if we think that quarrels don't happen!
 - *Otherwise, we'd be a perfect church - and I tell people, if you find the perfect church, don't join it, otherwise you'd mess it up!*
- We are growing numerically at a rapid rate - which means we'll have to make some changes. And I know that when the church makes changes, quarrels can happen!
- I hope and pray that they don't! But they can.
- But also I know that some people here have been on the receiving end of fights. And been caught up in the church at war.
- When people who you love and trust turn on you - it can leave deep scars.
- And if you have experienced this, I am sorry. That's not what God's church is meant to be.
- If you experience that here at St John's - please let me or one of the Wardens know. Please don't just let these things be swept under the rug...//

- So - church conflict and worldliness is the bad news. Worldliness in the church - will sadly, be a reality this side of the fall and this side of eternity.
- **The Amazing Grace of God**
- The good news?
- V6 "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- What relief this is for us.
- Since we can be sometimes so captivated by the world, so tempted into fights and quarrels, quickly baited - where can we turn to?
- The grace of God.
- The overflowing grace of God.
- Even when we were rejecting him, even though we were living as enemies of God - he gives us grace upon grace upon grace.
- Not treating us as we deserve, and not punishing us because of our disobedience, but providing amazing forgiveness!
- And the way to access this grace is through humility.
- It's through recognising our helpless state before God, seeing our sin and rebellion for what it is, saying sorry, and committing ourselves to live for Him.
- It's through repentance and faith in Jesus...//
- It's actually impossible for a proud person to access this grace.
- If a person is proud and trusting in themselves, then there's no chance of them accessing this grace, because in their mind - they have no need for it.
- That's why James quotes the Proverb. God opposes the proud. The proud are enemies of God!
- But lifts up the humble.
- He lifts up those who submit themselves to him.
- And then we are given some promises from James:
- V7 "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."
- If you remember way back in Chapter 1 - we saw that God doesn't tempt people, but that people are tempted by their own desires.
- But at the same time, James also recognises that the evil one is at play here as well. Fighting for our allegiance.
- And as we were reminded from Dan the other night, we can fall into two false errors when thinking of the devil and satan.
 - We ought not to think that he is behind every corner or door and be crippled by fear; but we also shouldn't fall into the trap of thinking that he doesn't exist
 - Either side of the pendulum isn't helpful!
- But we should acknowledge the existence of Satan and his schemes - but be aware that Jesus has already defeated him! He is chained up and is going to be finally judged when Jesus returns!
- And yet - he can still try to influence us. Causing us to doubt God's goodness. Causing us to doubt God's character. Planting the seed
- But James tells us the great solution - resist the devil and he will flee from you!
- That's all we need to do - resist the temptation. Cut it out at the root and it will be gone.
- And we have every spiritual resource given to us - particularly the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us.
- We also are told by Paul to put on the full armor of God in the end of Ephesians to resist!
- And he will flee.
- But don't just resist, but replace it with something - here's the next promise. Draw near to God - and he will draw near to you.
- Draw near to God, he will draw near to you.

- What does it mean to draw near to God?
- The classic Sunday School answer would be - read your bible, pray, and go to church.
- And while I think that's a great place to start - and the core of what it looks like, drawing near to God could look like something different!
 - We aren't just intellectual beings and brains on a stick - we are more complex than that:
 - Drawing near to God
 - could look like going for a walk and just observing God's creation.
 - could look like playing or singing worship music or listening to music.
 - could look like doing this as close friends, as maybe a prayer triplet
 - could look like writing out bible verses or making art out of them
 - Could look like listening to a podcast
 - This could look very different in different seasons of life!
- And in different seasons - the closeness of God may seem more intimate or sometimes more distant.
 - *In my relationship with God - there have been times of great intimacy*
 - *But also - to be honest lately, over the past few weeks and months I haven't felt that!*
 - *But the thing that I know and hold onto - is that my faith and relationship with God isn't based on my feelings, but based on the far more solid promises of God.*
 - *So that even though God may feel distant - I know that in reality, he is with me and all of us by the Holy Spirit!*
 - *And I hold onto the promise here - draw near to God - and he will draw near to you!*
- And James concludes this section with these words:
 - V8b "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."
- The ante-dote to everything that we saw in the bad-news - is repentance and humility.
- The church where people see their sin for what it is, lament it, confesses it, forgives it, and throws themselves on the mercy of Jesus - that's a church where there won't be quarreling, fighting, war, hatred!
- That's a type of church that I'd love to join....that I'd love us at St John's to be.
- A church:
 - that's not recognised because of its quarrels or fights...
 - or that's not even recognised by its fantastic strategy, or music programs, or busy schedule, or booming growth...
- But a church that is marked by this Christ-like humility and service.