

James 4B

- Sometimes our life problems are complicated and difficult to understand
 - But sometimes our problems aren't as complicated as we assume

One evening, I went with my parents to a fancy restaurant. Dad was about halfway through his meal when he took a hard look at the potato, called the waitress over and said, "This potato is bad!"

To my utter amazement, the waitress at this "5-Star" place picked the potato up, smacked it, put it back on the plate, and then told my Dad, "If that potato causes any more trouble, just let me know."

- James gives us an equally shocking answer to the question why do quarrels exist in the church
 - He says it's simple, really
 - The source of quarrels is lustful flesh that desires to have what the world wants
 - And when we don't get what we want, we fight with each other rather than ask God
 - And we're disappointed when we do ask but still don't get what we want because we ask with worldly motives
 - But James says we can't seek to be friends with the world, to be like them and to want what they want
 - Because God won't share us with the world, so He won't let us have satisfaction in those pursuits
 - Our Father knows what's best for us and won't give in when we ask 50 times
- So when our requests go ignored and our fellowship in the Body of Christ is unsatisfying, we need to examine our lives to see if this pattern is responsible
- Now James turns to exhorting us to a better path, the path that grace makes possible
 - In v.5, which we read last week, James says that God demands perfect allegiance and devotion from His people

- How do we meet such a demanding standard?
- Are we ever perfectly devoted to anyone or anything?
- Fortunately, James makes clear that our opportunity to remain devoted to God is a problem God Himself is ready to solve on our behalf

James 4:6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

- James says God gives a "greater grace"
 - God's grace is greater than our failures to remain devoted to Him
 - When the world begins to pull us away and entice us with one thing or another
 - God's grace to strengthen us in the face of these trials is sufficient to bring us through
 - James explains how this works in v.6-10
 - God follows a simple but powerful principle
 - He frustrates the proud but gives His greater grace to the humble
 - If we resist His will, He will bring our resistance to futility
 - But when we recognize we are weak and powerless, God steps in to strengthen us and direct us to better choices in His grace
 - We either push against him or we lean on Him

At Heather's house in Dallas one day, a hummingbird flew into their garage. The door was open, but the bird was stuck in that gap between the door and the ceiling. It kept flying higher bumping around, unable to see the gap by the door to get out.

An hour went by and they were unable to shoo the bird out. Heather remarked “If only the bird could figure out that in order to go up it needs to go down first” to which her husband responded “It’s just like Philippians 2”

- Like Philippians 2:

[Phil. 2:5](#) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
[Phil. 2:6](#) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

[Phil. 2:7](#) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

[Phil. 2:8](#) Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[Phil. 2:9](#) For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

- We are to follow Christ’s example...lowering ourselves in our own eyes
 - And accepting that God’s way is better than our own
- And James says the first step is to submit to God
 - Submission is the starting point
 - Submission is a heart attitude that leads to obedience, an action
 - Failing to submit is the same as seeking after the world
 - We aren’t agreeing with God’s priorities and standards and desires
 - We aren’t submitting to His decrees
 - But when we set aside what the world gives us as priorities, we take the first step toward submission to God
 - We set aside personal ambitions
 - And we make God’s ambitions our ambitions
 - In my own life it seems the issue is mostly one of time
 - I make myself God’s enemy when I set His will aside and pursue my own agenda

- But I demonstrate submission when I give my time to those things God wants me to pursue...when I follow His will
- Where do we find God's will?
 - First and foremost, we find it in His word
 - When we read His word and heed it, we take the first step to submission
 - I think finding God's will in His word is the context for the rest of v.7
 - Think about how the enemy works to undermine the lives of Christians
 - He distorts and twists God's word to cause us to doubt or disregard God's word
 - He brings us to a point where we are willing to set aside God's decrees and pursue the world's decrees instead
 - Just as in the Garden when he brought Woman to a point of doubting God's word
 - So the key is our focus on God's word, which is the manifestation of His will for His children
 - James says resist the devil and he will flee
 - Resist is *anthistemi* which means take a stand against
 - Take a stand against the devil's schemes by taking a stand against the worldly sources of wisdom
 - Take a stand by remaining in God's word and seeking truth there
 - Take a stand against the enemy by knowing and following God's decrees and resisting any temptation to follow the world
 - Taking this stand against the enemy is a step of preparation, not a strategy for battle
 - Armies don't prepare and train for combat while they are engaged with the enemy

- They train before the battle, working against one another in friendly combat
- They study and practice their drills and review their orders so they will be ready for the day of combat
- Christians don't prepare for battles with the enemy by waiting until they are in a moment of combat
 - We study our Bible, we practice righteousness, and we encourage each other for the day of combat
- Then when we face the enemy well-prepared to resist him, James says he will flee such preparation
 - Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 6:

[Eph. 6:10](#) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

[Eph. 6:11](#) Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

[Eph. 6:12](#) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

[Eph. 6:13](#) Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- So James says quarrels in the body will end when we seek God's grace to overcome our wandering hearts
 - First we humble ourselves
 - Then we submit to God's will
 - Third, we take a stand against the enemy and his efforts to pull us back from following God's will and into the world's desires
 - Fourth, we draw near to God
 - The term "draw near to God" is a Jewish phrase which means enter into worship
 - It comes from Leviticus where the nation of Israel is called to worship the Living God
 - We need to engage in regular, continual worship of God, drawing near to Him in corporate and personal worship

- James isn't talking about a place or an event necessarily
- He isn't saying, "Make sure you go to church on Sunday," though that wouldn't be a wrong way to implement this command
- Worship is drawing near to God in our daily lives
 - We certainly want to join together periodically to allow for an outward expression of worship
 - But never confuse this 90 minute event with worshipping God
 - Our weekly event is actually a training event that prepares us for the battles of our daily life, where we truly worship God
 - The worship that takes place outside the building is much more significant than the event inside
- When James says draw nearer to God, he's talking about establishing a daily pattern of worship similar to Romans 12:1-2

Rom. 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Rom. 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Draw near to God means patterning your life in a worshipful way, so that everything you do is an outward sign of worship
 - Paul said this style of living will be the opposite of conforming to this world – just like James
 - And he said it happens when we renew our minds so that we demonstrate the will of God
- So Paul gives the same pattern that James is giving
 - Conform to God's will, which we come to know as we learn His word, and this enables us to enter into a life of worship
- James gives examples of this lifestyle in v.8-10
 - People who draw near to God cleanse their hands, purify their hearts

- This is another Levitical phrase that means put aside both outward sinful acts and inward sinful thoughts
 - Don't be double-minded, hypocritical
 - Don't accept in yourselves the pattern of saying one thing and doing something else
 - Rather, be sad and mournful over sins
 - "Miserable" in Greek means in distress
 - Don't be happy or ambivalent over sin...mourn over it, be distressed over it
 - And let the laughter or gaiety associated with worldly sinful living turn into repentant sorrow
 - Don't think that James is saying that sinners have fun and Christians are miserable
 - He is talking about a heart attitude that takes pleasure in the world, taking joy in sin
 - Which is enmity with God
 - Instead of mourning over sin the way God does
 - It's a complete reversal of our fleshly priorities and perspective
 - Do these things, James says, and we will humble ourselves before God and He will exalt us
- You may not have noticed, but James has been teaching how to fulfill the first commandment of the Royal Law
 - Remember James is teaching how to live out our faith in actions rather than merely in words alone
 - And in Chapter 2 James says we are to speak and act as those who will be judged by the Royal Law
 - That's the Law that Jesus gave for the New Testament believer
 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength

- Love your neighbor as you love yourself
- And in Chapter 4, James says to these churches that they live in quarrels and disputes because there weren't living according to the law of their faith
 - They weren't loving God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength
 - And up to this point in the chapter, James has been describing how to live according to that first command
- Now he turns to the second half of the law, the command to love our neighbors differently than the world does

[James 4:11](#) Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

[James 4:12](#) There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

- As before, the secret begins in speech
 - In this case, it's how we speak about our brothers and sisters in the faith
 - James is probably referencing back to the quarrels that started when members of the church competed for positions of authority or other privileges
 - James says don't speak against your brother
 - In Greek the phrase literally means "to speak down against"
 - The same Greek word is translated as "slander" in 1 Peter 2:12
 - Don't put someone down in your speech, say bad things about a fellow Christian
 - James isn't prohibiting legitimate criticism, as when applying church discipline or holding a brother accountable
 - The Bible gives us clear guidance for how to address misbehavior in the body and deal with it privately and publicly

- We're talking about speaking negatively about a brother simply because we don't like something about them
 - Because we're disputing with them over something
- When we speak in an unflattering way against a fellow Christian we do three sinful things:
 - First, we judge our brother or sister
 - A hateful or negative statement about others in the faith are forms of judgment against another
 - Secondly, our speech itself is a violation of the Royal Law
 - It goes "against the law," which means that our harmful speech violates the law
 - The Law requires that we treat others with the love we show ourselves
 - Literally, we break the very law we are accusing another brother or sister of violating
 - We don't accuse ourselves of violating the Law, so neither should we speak badly about others in the faith
 - Finally, we place ourselves above the law, as a judge
 - We pretend the rules don't apply to us
 - This is the sin of hypocrisy
 - Of course, James sets the record straight in v.12
 - There is only One God, and we're not Him
 - And we please Him when we keep His Law rather than making ourselves a law of our own
- Finally, James ends his letter by giving two warnings to his Jewish readers
 - The rest of Chapter 4 is his warning to the Jewish believer, the Jewish Christian
 - The opening of Chapter 5 gives a different warning to the Jewish unbeliever

[James 4:13](#) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

[James 4:14](#) Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

[James 4:15](#) Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

[James 4:16](#) But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

[James 4:17](#) Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

- First, notice that both warnings begin with the phrase "Come now..."
 - To the believer, James speaks about living ignorant of God's will
 - But notice that the beginning of this sin is again a form of speech
 - We "tell" ourselves something in the sense that we decide what we will do without consulting God's will
 - The problem here isn't that we make plans
 - Planning isn't the problem
 - God is a God of order and planning is a necessary discipline to lead an orderly and productive life
 - In Genesis God gave Joseph a detailed plan covering 14 years, in his dream about the lean and fat cows
 - The issue is where we go for our plans
 - The man in v.13 is saying what he wants to do
 - And he presumptuously decides what that plan will be without considering God's will first
 - When we live this way, we aren't living by faith in God's word and will
 - We have set those things aside and we're living in our flesh
 - We are making assumptions about what tomorrow holds and we aren't leaning on God
 - We're back to acting proudly rather than humbling ourselves

- In fact in v.16 James describes this lifestyle as arrogance and boasting
 - It's a kind of proud living
- We've stupidly forgotten just how short life is, and how quickly it can end
 - Like a vapor, which means the fog of our breath in cold air
 - In other words, when we begin to plan a life without God's input, we are pretending we can direct our own future
 - But God has numbered our days already, according to Job 14:5
- James gives us a different plan
 - He says we should say "If the Lord wills..."
 - Now let's be clear what James expects
 - First, notice that the process begins agains with speech
 - Our sin is often tied to speech and so is our obedience
 - But sin doesn't end with speech
 - Our tongue is the rudder that then directs the entire ship into the rocks
 - Likewise, godly speech is the means to a godly outcome, it's not the end in itself
 - So James isn't expecting us to go around saying "if God wills" but then failing to actually live that way
 - I meet many Christians who use this phrase but I wonder how often they actually live their lives according to the principle
 - Do we consult God's will before we make plans
 - Or do we announce our own plans, and then casually add "if God wills"?
- Consider the wisdom of James
 - Seek God's will
 - Don't follow worldly wisdom or desires

- Prepare for the distractions and schemes of the enemy by studying God's word
 - Chart a course in life based upon the will He reveals to you
- Humble yourself
 - Pursue a life that worships God everyday
- Don't sin against your brother
- Sound advice