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James 3:13—4:10

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We are continuing our look at the book of James this morning.

And so far in James, he's encouraged us to consistent living.

He's writing to believers...

Those who have already placed their faith in Christ...

And he's leading us into mature discipleship with Christ...

Mature discipleship that pairs faith and actions...

Mature discipleship that lives out of response to God's grace in Christ.

This week we will continue to explore what it looks like to live as Christ's disciples...

...in a world that wars against the will of God.

As a pastor preparing a sermon...

The hope is that the Bible passage will first do its work in me...

That the message will speak into my life over the week as I'm shaping it for you.

Usually this does happen...

But there are times when this **really** happens...

When I know that the message is as much for me as it is for you.

This is one of those weeks.

We are going to be looking at envy this morning.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to James 3.

We will be reading James 3:13—4:10.

People of God, hear the Word of the Lord.

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

¹What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? ⁶But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble."

⁷Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-

minded. ⁹Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.
The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Who here is familiar with Black Friday festivities in the States?

Or who here has participated in the commotion of doorbuster shopping?

This Friday a lot of stores will open early...

The day after US Thanksgiving.

There's going to be some pretty good sales on hot-ticket items...

TV's, game consoles, laptops, popular children's toys and other pricy products.

The catch is that the sale is only for a limited time...

And there are only so many products available.

So there's a competition between customers to get the best products at the best price.

This is what's going on in the movie Jingle All the Way...

Where Arnold Swartzenegger is looking for Turbo Man doll for Christmas...

(SHOW VIDEO CLIP: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTcFsdIJ_Xo; STOP AT 2:00)

You may think that Hollywood has blown this out of proportion for the sake of entertainment...

But they actually didn't go far enough in capturing the mayhem.

Listen to a few stories of people engaged in Black Friday shopping...

These come from the retail associates who lived to tell the stories:

#1

"Back in my poor college days when I worked at Walmart we had a fight break out over a bike. Fists were thrown and there was some blood. Eventually one guy got a hold of it and managed to get away from the crowd, he rode the bike out of the store to flee his pursuers (without paying)."

#2

"Working in the electronics department. A little old lady punched a teenage boy in the face to get the last radio he had picked up. She snatched it up and ran."

Envy.

"A feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or [fortune]." (Google definition)

We want what someone else has.

Listen to James' words again:

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want." (4:1-2)

Although it sounds like James is speaking directly to the 21st century...

He's actually talking to his audience in the 1st century.

(I guess the human condition hasn't changed all that much.)

He isn't addressing a random group of people struggling to live sound lives...

He's talking to Christians!

Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ the Lord...

Those who are called to live apart from the ways of the world. (PAUSE)

In verse 4 he says to the Christians, "You adulterous people!"

This is one time when our attempt to use gender inclusive language hinders our reading.

The literal reading says, “You adulteresses!”
 Not that he’s picking on one gender over the other...
 But he’s using language of the covenant...

The covenant between God and his people;
 Where God is the husband and Israel is his wife.
 She can either be faithful to God...
 Or she can commit adultery and give herself to another lover.

The other lover in this instance is the world:

“Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?” (4:4)
 “Don’t you know that you’re giving yourself to another lover?”

Friendship in the ancient context had stronger connotations than it has for us now.
 We can be friends with someone today and still keep our views and beliefs separate from theirs...

We don’t have to believe what they believe.

But for the people of James’ time, friendship meant seeing things the same way...

It meant having the same outlook on life...
 An outlook that was opposed to God’s.
 Friendship with the ways of the world.

And what is the way of the world that James is getting at?

Living life from the posture of envy:

Not having what they wanted...

Being jealous of what others have.

Living with the view that possessions count for everything.

The more I have, the better I feel.

It sees this world as having limited resources...

There is only so much to go around so competition is a must!

If someone has more, than I have less.

I have to fight, quarrel, and kill so that I get my share.

This is the way of the world!

This is the way directly opposed to God.

“You adulteresses!”

“You are being unfaithful to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Look at your lives!”

“Friendship with the world is enmity towards God!” (PAUSE)

I mentioned earlier that this message was especially challenging for me.

As a new pastor I want to do well...

I want to succeed in my work as a minister of the Word.

So of course I want to be successful in my preaching.

But my visions of success are aligned with those of the world.

In order for me to succeed I have to be better than someone else.

I can’t just be content with being used by the Lord.

It’s this idea of competition...

Listening to other pastors preach is always a challenge for me.

There’s always comparison...

If they have a really great illustration that helps to land a point...

It creates envy...

If their delivery is captivating, it makes me want to be more captivating...

There's this ranking system going on internally...

I want what they have.

Of course, we both can't have it!

There's not enough to go around.

If I see less of it in them, then that means there's more for me.

If I see more of it in them, it grieves me.

I feel my lack...

I feel the competition...

I feel the envy crawling all over me.

Do you know what I'm talking about?

You get passed by at work for the promotion you've been hoping for...

Instead your co-worker gets it.

You want to be happy for them, but really you just want that promotion.

You envy what they have.

Or how about sibling rivalries?

Your brother or sister is starting to do well in life...

Things are going their way with the kids, with marriage, or at work.

The envy monster makes its way into your mind...

You grieve that they're doing so well.

We don't want to admit it, but we actually like it when things go wrong for them.

We talk to them about their struggles at work...

We talk to them about their relationship mess...

And we say, "I'm so sorry to hear that..."

But deep down, at the core of our sinful person...

Are we somehow comforted by their failing situation?

Their being down, brings us up.

It's so twisted and distorted but this is what we do.

And Facebook...

Talk about envy.

Who here has scrolled the walls of Facebook only to realize everything we don't have?

We don't have the perfect family that went to Asia last year to do humanitarian work...

We didn't take a luxurious trip to the Caribbean...

We aren't full of smiles...

We aren't in a relationship with the perfect mate.

There's this intense competition going on for what we see as limited resources...

If they have more...

Then I have less.

If I have more...

Then I'm happier.

So we drive harder to get what we want—

Ignoring everything we already have—

And we do all sorts of stuff that even we're ashamed of.

So what can we do about envy?

What do we do with such an insidious monster?

First, we recognize envy in our life...

Ask the Spirit to make you aware of this little envy monster...

Ask and you shall receive...

I've come into contact with it multiple times a day this week.

Envy is everywhere...it drives us.

Ask God to open your eyes to the places where it shows up the most in your life.

Be willing to have your eyes opened by the Spirit.

So recognize envy, and then starve it in the power of the Spirit.

Give yourself a break from scrolling the walls of Facebook...

Set a time limit.

Give yourself a break from visiting malls or certain stores...

Where your envy is used against you...

Smart advertisers are using it to sell you the latest and greatest...

So *you* can be better than the next person.

So you can be the one who's envied.

Second, take the action.

A lot of times we don't act, because we don't have the feelings to go along with it.

We wait for the feelings before we act.

What if you took the action first, and trusted the feeling to follow?

You have bitter resentment towards your co-worker for getting that promotion you wanted?

You don't feel like congratulating them...

You really can't stand looking at them.

Take the action.

Invite them to lunch to celebrate with them...

The feelings usually follow.

Taking the action means prayer.

We don't want to pray for them in all of their happiness and success...

Pray for them, and the feelings follow.

The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead is in you...

Inviting you to be transformed more into his image.

Finally, and most importantly...

"Submit yourselves to God" as James says (4:7).

James is calling for repentance.

"Wash your hands...purify your hearts...grieve, mourn and wail."

"Turn from your sin!"

With our envy—

In our friendship with the ways of this competitive world—

We are giving ourselves to another lover.

Even though we have been adopted into God's family...

We are playing by the rules of a different family.

We're playing by the rules of this world.

We're living under this idea of scarcity, and fighting for ourselves, and acquiring more to make us feel worthy. (PAUSE)

The Spirit has convicted us of our sin...
 And now we're called to repent.
 To come before God in honest confession...
 For many of us this is hard:
 We see God as an angry Father looking to punish his children...
 Just waiting to crack us one for our sins...
 Or we wonder if we've shed enough tears...
 If our repentance is genuine...
 But this is not the image we're given in Scripture.
 "Come near to God and he will come near to you."
 Give up the fight.
 We're too weak to overcome sin...
 We're too weak to overcome envy...
 God is inviting us to turn back to him.
 Christ has paid for our sins...
 He's already satisfied God's anger toward our sin.
 It's not dependent on how many tears we shed...
 It's dependent on the shed blood of Christ.
 God is calling us as his children...
 As Christ's disciples...
 To find ourselves in him.
 He has provided more than enough grace and love to go around:
 "He gives us more grace" (4:6).
 There will be an empty hole where we starve envy*
 Our hearts will continue to be restless...
 We will continue in this envy and competitive game...
 Until our hearts are satisfied in the Lord.
 God promises that as we turn to him—
 By the power of his Spirit—
 He will come near to us.
 It is his delight that he forms us more and more into the image of his Son.
 For his glory, for our good, and for the good of the whole world.
 Let's respond to God's call to repentance, by repenting and turning back to him.
 Let's pray these words together.
Merciful God,
We have made close friends with the ways of this world.
We rejoice in the misfortune of others,
And lustfully desire the good things that others have.
We are powerless to break this habit,
And feel loss when we try.
Our possessions never satisfy, so we cry out for more.
We humbly turn to you.
Sustain us with your bountiful Spirit.
Amen.