

Introduction

Many are the songs that have been written about friendship. They include a number of well-known lines. Bill Withers wrote, "Lean on me when your not strong and I'll be your friend; I'll help you carry on. For it won't be long `til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on." Dionne Warwick sang, "In good times and bad times, I'll be on your side forever more; that's what friends are for." The Beatles recorded, "I get by with a little help from my friends." But who can forget the genie of the lamp singing, "You ain't never had a friend like me"? Good friendships are a healthy part of life. Having someone to lean on, someone to be by your side no matter what is a blessing. But this morning we are going to talk about the kind of friendship you do not want—the kind of friendship that will be your undoing.

[Read Text and Pray]

When last we met, our attention was on the closing verses of chapter 3. James instructed that there is a clear distinction between two kinds of wisdom. True wisdom is from above, from heaven. It is marked by meekness in heart and gentleness in action, and results in a harvest of righteousness. The other wisdom is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. It is marked by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in the heart. Its actions are hostile and pugnacious and produce disorder and every sort of vile practice. This was not the last word that James wanted to say about worldly wisdom, however. As we turn to chapter 4, we observe that James elaborates on the lamentable defects of this wisdom from below. Looking ahead, we will see that it is characterized by presumption and that it abuses wealth. That will come later in chapter 4 and into chapter 5. But this morning in the first part of chapter 4, we learn that this false wisdom is a friend of the world. James's main concern in these first 5 verses is to reveal the core value of friendship with the world and three consequences of that friendship.

Let's start then with the core value of friendship with the world. Friendship with the world is . . .

I. Driven by Passions.

A. There are problems among the folks to whom James is writing. They quarrel and fight. Their prayers are pathetic. And they have made themselves enemies of God. The root of these troubles is that they have made friends with the world. They are in the world AND OF the world. James has already said that pure and undefiled religion before God includes keeping oneself unstained by the WORLD. Friendship with the world is walking in harmony with the world. Rather than seeking to be unstained, it has been colored with the dye that colors the garments of the world.

In this context, "the world" represents the opposite of heaven. Immediately above, James has said that false wisdom is not from above but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. What is of the world is opposed to God. Jesus pointed out that "the world" hated him and said, "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18-19). Paul warns in Romans 12 that we NOT be conformed to this world but transformed. And John tells us NOT to love the world or the things in the world. The world in this sense refers to that which is at odds with Christ and his lordship. It is the world's values and the world's pursuit and the world's way of pursuing. And it basically boils down to desire.

The core value of friendship with the world is selfish desire. "What I want for myself" is what drives those who are the cause of the trouble in the churches. Conflict and quarrel are built upon the foundation of selfish worldly desire. James says, "You desire and do not have," and "you covet and cannot obtain." Desires run rampant for what individuals do not have. They want more. They are not satisfied. They are discontent. What they want is for their passions to be filled. The Greek word translated "passions" is hēdonē. Can you guess our word that comes from it? How about hedonism. These are passions and desires for pleasures that provide fleshly satisfaction. Certainly they can include physical pleasure but also the pleasure of material comforts, prestige, and recognition. These are things you want to make you feel good and feel good about feeling good and feel good about yourself. You want to be right in the eyes of the world. You want the world to see you as beautiful, smart, skilled. You want to be liked and considered special. You want to get even with those who have treated you maliciously—the satisfaction of revenge. You want material comforts and status symbols. You want to be at ease in the world. You want to be in control of your world. These are desires which James has already said in chapter 1:13-15 are what gives birth to sin. These passions are what drives friendship with the world.

B. Christians always have to be on the lookout for the remnants of these desires in our hearts. We are constantly bombarded through all of our senses with the allure of the world and all its means of satisfying our pride and senses. Paul warns us not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We have to learn to regulate our thoughts and keep them from pondering and yearning for the desires of the world. Worldliness happens in Christians as we allow our thinking and pursuits to be shaped in terms of what the world is seeking. What is it you are wanting? Is it of heaven? Or is it of earth? If we do not regulate the desires which arise out of the flesh, they will regulate us. It is the way the world exists. Before and apart from conversion we all live in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, walking according to the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air.

Learn to recognize the desires in you which arise from the flesh. Practice putting them to death. Exercise control over them because they are the core values of friendship not with God but with the world. When these desires are allowed to flourish, we are being friends with the world, and catastrophic consequences take place. Let's look at them.

Friendship with the world . . .

II. Destroys Peace.

Because of uncontrolled and selfish desires, peace is disturbed. James asks, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" And he proceeds to answer. The cause is your passions. They drive you to be at war with each other. You fight and quarrel and murder one another. These are strong terms. Surely we realize that James does not envision literal cases of murder. However, he does remind us that the use of combative words does break the law of God against murder. He, no doubt was listening when Jesus was preaching. He heard him instruct folks of the deep-reaching aspect of God's law. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders is liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." With both words as well as actions, hate murders without literally taking a life. It brings pain, maims hearts, and whips up discord and strife and disembowels peace.

Where selfish desires reign, persons are at each others throats. There is competition, and animosity, when desires go unfulfilled. Those who let their selfish desires reign see others as the enemy. "You are in my way!" "Hey! You got what I wanted!" "You hurt me!" In the economy of self, I am the

victim and everyone else is the villain. I am justified in striking out at them for depriving me of what I want. In the economy of selfish desires, I do not see others as opportunities to serve but as competitors for being served. And I go to war to get what I want. Is this not what Russia is doing in Ukraine? They have gone to war and are bringing pain and misery and death in order to get what they want. It is such an ugly, ugly and despicable scene. But it shows us vividly the spiritual results of our selfishness in relationships.

These aspects of worldliness destroy peace in the very place where God's desire and design is that peace should flourish. The word of God says, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" If everyone in the church treated each other with the vibe of the wisdom from above, the church would be the most pleasant earthly place imaginable. Paul's prayer for the Romans was, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus died to make peace on the vertical plane between us and God. He yielded up himself on the cross to satisfy the justice of God. As sinners we have all broken peace with God, and Jesus died to set that right. And you must turn to him and rest in his work. But Jesus also died to bring peace on the horizontal plane. Bearing with one another in humility and gentleness and patience, maintaining the unity of the Spirit stems from the peace Jesus has brought his people.

We were meant to be a body with many members but with each valuing each other in such a way that together we supply health and promote growth among ourselves. That is the design. But self-seeking, desire-driven sheep put whole flocks in disarray. Self-seeking and desire-driven spouses mutilate the joys they were meant to experience as man and wife. Self-seeking and desire-driven parents ravage the lives of those families they were meant to bless. Self-seeking and desire-driven children fracture the peace godly families can know.

Today is Father's Day. What a precious gift godly fathers are to their families! There is such potential for blessing. When a man is selfless and serves as did Christ with gentleness and meekness but with strength, his family can experience peace and abundant blessing. Such fathers are to be celebrated! But O the potential for detriment when fathers seek but the fulfillment of their own selfish desires. Peace is sacrificed on that altar. It is substituted with resentful murder and conflict and disdain. The family begins to resemble Ukraine. May such fathers look at such damage and repent. May they resolve to bless instead of wound.

As James said in the last verse of chapter 3, "A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Peacefully reaping that kind of harvest demands the sacrifice of self instead of the satisfaction of self. If you are unwilling to deny yourself, you will instead of peace reap disturbance of the peace along with every kind of vile thing. "A harvest of unrighteousness is sown in discord by those who destroy peace."

Friendship with the world . . .

III. Disorders Prayer.

Friendship with the world destroys peace by decaying our relationships with others, but it also directly affects our relationship with God. If your prayer life is in shambles, you can assume that it is related to your love-life. You are in love with yourself and you are seeking to satisfy yourself with what you desire. Two consequences of selfish pleasure-seeking disorder one's relationship with God.

A. First, there is prayerlessness. James says, "You do not have because you do not ask." All this longing and yearning and desiring driving all this discord reflects the restlessness of the human heart without God. One of St. Augustine's most well-known sayings is this: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." The human problem is not that we have experienced longing and desire. Our problem is that we seek to satisfy ourselves with the world, with the flesh, and by listening to the temptations of the devil. We look for satisfaction in all the wrong places. We turn away from fellowship and communion with God. We seek to satisfy and excite our souls in the opposite direction from the face of God. To the extent that you are seeking satisfaction in the world by the things of the world in the ways of the world, two things will certainly be true. One, you will not be satisfied. And two, you will not be walking with God in prayer because what you are seeking is not God. What you need, what will truly satisfy you is right there. You are starving but you walk right past the manna that is there at your tent because you deny that it will satisfy.

David knew where his heart would be satisfied. He wrote, "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek YOU; my soul thirsts for YOU; my flesh faints for YOU, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. . . . Because YOUR steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise YOU. . . . My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise YOU with joyful lips" (Psalm 63:1-5).

Your soul will never be satisfied with a bottle, a syringe, with sex, with worldly excitement, with inactivity, with applause, or with physical comfort. Your soul will never cease to be restless until you walk with God, a significant part of which will involve time spent with him in prayer. Psalm 84:11 says, "No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly." But James adds, "You do not have because you do not ask."

B. Okay, says James, there are some of you who are disputing with me right now. You claim that you DO pray, but you are not getting the things you are asking for. The problem with you is that you are asking for the wrong things. The very things you are seeking will not satisfy even if you got them. God loves you too much to give you what you are asking him for. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

We see it frequently. People consider the promises of God to answer prayer. Jesus' words ring in their ears. They hear him say: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened." With great anticipation, the worldly mind suddenly comes up with a wish list. It drips with worldliness. It has the passions of the world written all over it. Yet even if we are not prone to ask for new cars, fine mansions, and fame, we still often come to God with me-centered requests that are concerned with the kinds of things that will make life easier and more fun than the kinds of things that will make us more holy and more satisfied in God. We overlook the rest of what Jesus had to say.

He said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11). God does not want all your worldly passions to be satisfied. He gives good and perfect gifts. God wants the satisfaction of your soul for all eternity. He knows what satisfies and what does not. He knows what you really need and what you do not. What WE need is to get on his wavelength of wisdom and seek the things that are truly good for us. Then, when we ask we will receive!

Now, James brings us face-to-face with a third consequence of being friends with the world. Friendship with the world . . .

IV. Demands Provocation.

The first consequence pertains to our relationships with each other in the human community. The second consequence has to do with our relationship to God. This third consequence pertains to God's relationship to us. When we are friends with the world, we provoke the jealousy of God.

A. Friendship with the world is adultery against God! James puts it graphically, "You adulterous people!" A passion-driven heart is an adulterous heart toward God. When you hunger and thirst not for God but for fame, fortune, fat bank accounts, recognition, and pleasure, you are in violation of the one who made you and brought you to himself. You have abandoned your faithful and devoted husband who only wants to do you good. You have gone off after other lovers and played the harlot. You are shameful and unfaithful. You have abandoned God and you provoke his jealousy.

B. Friendship with the world is also enmity against God. Adultery against God is not simply a fall into another attraction. It cannot be seen as an innocent mistake. It is not an unintended cave-in to a moment of thoughtlessness. No. It is an act of treason, an act of war, an act of purposeful hostility toward God. It is taking up arms against him. It is taking a stand with the devil. It constitutes accusations against the Lord that he does not want what is good for me; he is not loving; he is abusive; he cannot be trusted; he is dangerous. He wants to keep me from being all I could be. These charges antagonize God. They call him to stand up against me as my foe because that is the way I have treated him. Worldliness is war against God.

C. The adultery and enmity are real. James is not being overly dramatic here. He cites the Scripture to prove his point. He is not quoting a particular verse, but is calling to mind the teaching from the Scripture. I am just going to say that James 4:5 is one of the most challenging verses in the New Testament for translation and interpretation. The different translations we use represent the difference. There seem to be two different options. Either James is referencing the jealousy of God as a good thing or the human tendency to envy as a bad thing. The context seems to me to relate to the jealousy of God. God is a jealous God. It is not that he wishes he possessed what someone else possesses. Rather, the jealousy of God relates to another possessing what RIGHTLY belongs to him, like when you worship an idol. And this is why friendship with the world is a terrible affront to God. The world has never given you anything. Its wisdom is a lie. It turns you away from God. And yet, you would seek your satisfaction in worldly passions? It provokes the jealousy of God, a jealousy which is a very good thing.

So understand that friendship with the world calls for a response from God. It is the right response of a spouse against whom adultery has been committed. It is the response of an enemy who has been attacked. It is the response of a jealous God whose deity and love have been disregarded.

We should despise worldliness and passion-driven desires within us. We must control them. We must submit our whole selves to our great and glorious creator that we truly enjoy all the good he has to give and lest we have to face him not as friend but as foe. If God is your friend, the world will not be, but if the world is your friend, God will become your foe. The world may seem threatening, but God made the world and all things in it.

Conclusion

Friendship may be a popular theme among secular artists, but the truth is there has never been a better friend than Jesus, and there are some stirring songs about our true friend Jesus.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden, Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge— Take it to the Lord in prayer;
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there.

All my life was full of sin when Jesus found me;
All my heart was full of misery and woe,
Jesus placed His strong and loving arms about me
And He led me in the way I ought to go.
No one ever cared for me like Jesus;
There's no other friend so kind as He.
No one else could take the sin
And darkness from me; O how much He cares for me.

Why would you or I even think of giving up friendship with Jesus to be a friend of the world?

Benediction

Jesus is the truest friend there has ever been. No one ever cared for you like he. He will never forsake his friends. Let us not forsake him.