

Faith's Friendship

Lesson for Sunday, December 10, 2023

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ With a new chapter comes a new verse to memorize. The verse comes from today's lesson – verse 4. Take a minute to read it as a class and to encourage your class to memorize it together.
- ⇒ Remember the context of James. He is a pastor writing to his church that has been scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Christianity was new and they needed direction.
- ⇒ It could be argued that the central idea of James is found in chapter 1, verse 27. Here James defines what true Christianity is supposed to be. The rest of the book is an explanation and expansion of this idea.
- ⇒ Read 1:27. Point out that the central command is “to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” God's people are to be distinct. They are to be different than the world around them.
- ⇒ In today's text, James takes this idea and gets even more direct.
- ⇒ In James 3 we saw two pictures of wisdom. In chapter 4:1-10, James paints two pictures friendship.

BIBLE STUDY:

1. Friendship with the World (James 4:1-5)
 - a. God's people are called to be holy – set apart for God and for His purposes.
 - i. Think of how this differs from what many Christian testimonies sound like.
 - ii. Often, we emphasize what Christianity does for us. We place ourselves at the center of our faith.
 - iii. Christianity is all about Him. He is the center. He is not here to serve us; we are here to serve Him!
 - b. Too many Christians are too close to the world. How does this happen? What happens when this happens? James gives us three thoughts to consider.
 - c. First, friendship with the world comes from the sinful desires of the flesh (vs. 1-2).
 - i. James talks about the desires that battle within each of us. We want selfish gain, pleasure in the world and what we perceive to be the best for us.
 - ii. Notice James points to how these sinful desires impact our relationships. When you put two sinfully selfish people together it leads to disputes.
 - iii. James says in verse 2 that when left unchecked, these desires lead to serious sins. It is also good to remember Jesus's words about murder in Matthew 5:21-22.
 - iv. James point is clear: Sinful desires are dangerous.
 - d. Second, these sinful desires are motivated by a longing for earthly pleasure (vs. 3).
 - i. When we live selfishly, we probably don't have the strongest prayer life.
 - ii. James says that even if you are praying, you are not going to get what you ask for when your desires are not in the right place. Even our prayers can be self-centered!
 - iii. Friendship with the world says, “My will be done, and my name be great.” Friendship with God says, “Thy will be done, hallowed be Your name!”
 - iv. This is where we realize that hostility with others is really evidence of hostility with God. All this leads to a startling statement in verse 4...
 - e. Third, friendship with the world results in spiritual adultery against God (vs. 4).
 - i. Throughout the Old Testament, God describes His relationship with His people like marriage. When His people forsake Him in sin, it is a picture of spiritual unfaithfulness or adultery (see Jeremiah 3:20).
 - ii. The picture is serious: the more we are conformed to the pattern of the world, living like the world and loving this world, the more we betray our God and cheat on Him.

- iii. Discuss: What would be some signs that we are more in love with the world than with God?
- 2. Friendship with God (vs. 6-10)
 - a. Just like in chapter 3, James contrasts these two pictures of friendship. Look at how he describes friendship with God.
 - b. First, friendship with God comes from the gracious desire of God (vs. 6a).
 - i. In verse 6 we read that God gives more grace.
 - ii. James has presented a very high standard of what it means to follow the Lord. We would be tempted to think, "This is too hard!" This is where we see the grace of God!
 - iii. By God's grace, He will produce the fruit of faith in you. See 1 Thessalonians 5:24. God is gracious, merciful, loving and He willingly supplies all we need to obey His commands.
 - c. Second, friendship with God begins with a willingness to be humble (vs. 6-10).
 - i. If pride is the root of all sin, humility is the key to holiness.
 - ii. Look at the words James uses to describe a humble attitude:
 - 1. Verse 6 & 10: Humble
 - 2. Verse 7: Submit (to willingly line up under)
 - 3. Verse 8: Draw near to God (to come near)
 - 4. Verse 9: Be afflicted, mourn and weep (humility recognizes we have nothing to offer God and deserve nothing from Him)
 - iii. The key point to recognize is found in verses 6 & 10. Notice how James uses the word humble. It is a command we are to obey. We are to humble ourselves.
 - iv. Don't miss what James says at the end of verse 6. When we refuse to humble ourselves, we are resisted by God Himself. Let that sink in for a minute.
 - d. Third, friendship with God makes all the difference (vs. 7, 10).
 - i. When we humble ourselves, when we are friends with the Lord, we will be empowered to resist the Devil and he will flee from you (vs. 7). Resist means to oppose or to stand against. God will give grace to the humble so they can oppose the Devil.
 - ii. When we humble ourselves, God will lift us up (vs. 10). God will lead us to a whole new level of righteous living that begins with humility. He will give us proper view of self-worth and dignity, despite our shortcomings.

APPLICATION: How do we humble ourselves? What does this look like in everyday life? James lists nine imperative verbs in this text that describe what this looks like. From that list, here are practical things we are to do as we seek to walk with God. List these and discuss what they look like in practice.

- a. Resist the devil forcefully (vs. 7)
- b. Seek God repentantly (vs. 8-9)
- c. Pursue purity holistically (vs. 8-9)
- d. Treat sin seriously (vs. 8-9)
- e. Trust God completely (vs. 7-8, 10)