

WEEKEND Edition 03/04 September 2022

“Covet & Quarrels” James 4:1-3

Good weekend to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

In some parts of the world this is "Labor Day Weekend" and that's a very big deal for many people. For some it's the holiday from work on Monday. I know of many places where summer ends and school begins the day after Labor Day. So, I wonder what this weekend means for YOU, my friend?

Join me as we again gather inside the little house in Jerusalem where James the apostle is writing a very important first letter to the Jewish Jesus followers known as 'Christians' in many parts of the Roman Empire. The year is about 48ad, and times are very tenuous for the people who will read this letter. As Jewish Jesus followers, they are rejected as traitors by traditional and especially orthodox Jews who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah. The Romans see these 'Christians' as members of a crazy religious sect who are followers of man crucified as a criminal. *Of course, both the Jews and the Romans reject any notion of Jesus' resurrection, and they disregard any ridiculous stories of His miracles.*

So, James is taking very seriously the accurate writing of what he senses the Holy Spirit of God is placing in his mind and heart for this letter. Clarity is needed! I imagine James speaks out loud every word he writes, so let's listen and watch, just don't get so close that you bump his writing arm, parchment and stylus are very expensive these days!

James speaks these powerful words slowly as he writes, nodding his head in agreement: ***"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill! You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."*** (James 4:1-3) James leans back to ponder...oh, my such powerful but true words! How will these words be received by his fellow Christians all across the Empire?

Let's take it one phrase at a time...

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" Yes James, you are so right... we have all lived with that deep inner struggle. May I ask my friends, *do you know yourself well enough to understand the battle inside of you?*

Is it the battle of envy that other people appear to have more things or enjoy life more than you?

Is it anger about things you've experienced that seems so unfair to you, such injustice? Is it frustration that so many things seem to get in the way of you pursuing your dreams? Is it family dysfunction or corruption in government or law enforcement or greedy businesses taking advantage of you or is it medical or dental professionals giving you medical advice, but you don't trust them? *What are the deep desires inside you that are causing your inner battles which spill out of you into quarrels and even fights?*

James continued: "**You desire but do not have, so you kill! You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.**" Now does that seem extreme to you, my friends. But it's true, isn't it? Oh, when James talks about killing, he is not necessarily talking about premeditated murder of another person, he may be talking about the killing of a person's business or another person's marriage or another person's reputation.

Can you see how the unfulfilled envious desires of one person could cause them to say or do things which could badly damage these very practical aspects of another person's life? Isn't it true that coveting or deep desire is the motivation behind a huge amount of human pursuit?

Athletes '**covet**' a championship trophy, so they drive themselves mercilessly to be the best. Business leaders **covet** a larger share of the market, so they push their employees to work harder and perhaps begin some unscrupulous business practices to surpass their competitors. "**Covet**" *is behind every flirtatious look or word and every adulterous act. "Covet" is the motivation for most purchases, large and small.* In fact, some economists might say '**covet**' is what keeps the economy of your country functioning! Now think about that my friends!

But do you see that James is warning us about the dark power and the cancerous spread of '**covet**'. '**Covet**' *consumes our hearts and motivates our minds to dwell on what could be even without the restraint of what is right, and what is legal, and what is honorable.*

But James does not simply warn us, James invites us to consider and pursue God's alternative to '**covet**'. "**You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**" Do you see it my friends? *James helps us see there is something deeper, even more sinister than '**covet**'*. It's in you and me and every person. It's personal 'pleasure'.

The fancy word for this is 'hedonism'. It means a person will do whatever it takes to achieve or acquire that which they believe will give them pleasure and make them happy! Now think about that a moment. *The hedonistic root in all of us awakens in us a desire for what we do not have.*

That desire, when allowed to find a fertile place to root in our heart breeds 'covet' and covet when it moves from our heart to our mind produces a plan to acquire whatever it is we covet, even if it belongs to someone else!! Did you get that? That was powerful, wasn't it?

I know what you are thinking my friends and guess what... Jesus already answered the question when He said: **"Your Father in heaven knows what you need even before you ask Him!"** (Matt. 6:8) Wow! If that is really true, then I don't need to allow 'covet' even a moment of time to try and root in my heart or mind! God already knows what I need, in fact He knows far better than I since He made me and has sustained my life from conception to this moment! Oh, but wait... did you notice something? Jesus uses a very different word from what James used. Jesus uses the little phrase **'what you need'**. James uses the phrase **"what you want"!** Do you see the difference? No matter what language you speak, there is a huge difference between **what you NEED and what you WANT**, isn't there? Probably you've had that conversation more than once with your child if you are a parent or grandparent, right?

Look at James. He has put down his stylus and parchment and he is standing again by that window looking out at the people so busily going about their lives in the marketplace. Listen, do you hear the haggling over price out there? People pursuing what they want. The vendor wants the highest price he can get. The buyer wants to spend the least amount of money, but they sure do want that item on the table. Back and forth they go. *Both passionate about what they WANT and neither of them thinking much about what they NEED!* Oh, my how the simple act of a small purchase can turn into a shouting match and accusations of deceitfulness and robbery and even some slander about character and family heritage.

The noise out there in contrast with the quiet here in the room with James, and the parchment on the table with incredible words from God written on it, all call me to pause and reflect. *Where do quarrels and fights that I have become involved with begin deep in me? What is that part of me that produces such evil?* What about **"covet"**? Do I find myself coveting and then actually making a plan to satisfy my hedonism rather than coming to God with my desire and my request? And what have I both taught and modeled for my children and my grandchildren? Oh, my friends, I need to pause and speak with Jesus about all this... what about you? And here's a song that will help us consider these very, very important and challenging words from James! And I'll meet you right back here Monday since James has so much more to tell us.

Today's Scripture is James 4:1-3.