

Sermon to the saints of God that are assembled at Topeka – Sunday, December 2, 2018

...know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?... – James 4:4

Good morning, beloved. I have been spending focused time in the book of James for a while, now, and this morning I would like to offer a few remarks concerning this vital, subtle, deceptive concept of friendship of the world as framed in James. By the end, you may find some ways in which these remarks are both aided by and further amplify some of the ideas presented in the past two sermons delivered by brothers Ben and Charles. But first, since I have been asked multiple times, let us speak to this blessed epistle's authorship.

There are three prominent men named James in the New Testament (and others mentioned). One is James the brother of John, who was one of the 12 who were chosen by Christ during His ministry on Earth to be his disciples. He was amongst those who were brought to what is described as the 'Mount of Transfiguration':

And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. – Matt. 17:1,2

This James was martyred around 43 A.D.

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. – Acts 12:1,2

Another of Jesus' apostles was "James the son of Alphaeus." (Mt. 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, Acts. 1:13) We know very little about this blessed servant of God, beyond the aforementioned passages of scripture. We don't really have anything dispositive in discounting him from consideration as the author of this epistle (and in the most important of ways, it doesn't *really* matter – as the Holy Spirit of God moved every scriptural author to the precise words that we have). We do, however, have a pretty good scriptural connection to conclude that it was James, the familial brother of Jesus, who is the author of this text. Our spiritual brother Paul writes of this James:

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. – Gal. 1:18,19

This James eventually became very prominent in the New Testament church, having come onto

the scene, being present with the apostles in Jerusalem as the Church began after Jesus' departure:

And when he (Christ) had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight...Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. - Acts 1:9, 12-14

He had grown up with Jesus, was converted after Jesus' resurrection, and immediately began associating with the apostles. Later in Acts, he appears as an elder of the church at Jerusalem, being consulted and speaking with authority to end a controversy over the circumcision of gentile believers (Acts 15:13–19). And as an elder of the church at Jerusalem, it is reasonable to suggest that he is the author of the New Testament book that bears his name, especially given its nature and thesis when laid against the hot persecution against that church which scattered its members. Consider both the brief description of the persecution that followed Stephen's stoning at Acts 7 and the salutation of the epistle of James:

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. – Acts 7:59,60 – 8:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. – James 1:1

All scripture is, in a true sense, written toward the singular, unspeakably marvelous end (Omega) which is the magnification and glorification of Christ on His throne, with His bride, having made all His enemies His footstool. It seems pretty clear, however, that the *near* context of this salutation in James 1:1 is *from* an elder of that assembly of believers which started at Jerusalem *to* those who were scattered from amongst the church at Jerusalem at the hot persecution that had risen against her at that time.

This epistle is brimming with doctrine, exhortation, encouragement, admonition and rebuke – ten years of sermons could easily be spent on it without redundancy. I would like to take a closer look at a small cluster of verses in James 4 that speak to a very subtle and deceiving notion that troubles my heart.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. – James 4:4-10

We hold a sign when we preach on the streets of this evil world that echoes, in part, this very sobering subject, and we see the many admonitions and warnings in scripture concerning the deep corruption and wickedness of the worldling and the deceptiveness of this evil world. The parable of the sower and the seed, in like manner, expresses this danger when the seed (or word) is sown in the ground (or heart) that is described as having become unfruitful:

And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. - Mark 4:19

Our dear brother John warns hard against the same notion:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. - 1John 2:15-17

Paul warns our brother Timothy, and us, against this notion in a similar fashion:

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. - 2Tim. 2:4

The stark admonition given in James 4 is addressed primarily to that little scattered group of believers who began at Jerusalem, and by extension, to us. The words, when properly analyzed, are very hard to take at first. Those people who he is addressing in the near context, *and* to all

of God's elect by extension, are being addressed *as* adulterers and adulteresses. Not as a warning *against becoming* that way: as having *already been in* that sin. And to be clear, here, we are not talking (primarily) about the carnal version of adultery – that being extra-marital sexual relations. We are talking about spiritual adultery – and while I'm not trying to put 'grades' to sin, we are talking about a much darker, pernicious, subtle and deceptive sin. He is calling them spiritual adulterers. And in fact, he is calling us *all* spiritual adulterers, which is a very saddening notion to my heart - and I suspect, yours. There is a remedy for this sadness, which we will get to shortly – and the sadness is ultimately a good thing, which we will also get to in just a bit. For now, we are left with the admonition and rebuke, including its basis. So, it's important that we get clear in our minds about two concepts, here, that seem to form the basis of this spiritual adultery: 'friendship of the world' and 'the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.'

Friendship of the world is a concept easily glossed over, when it comes to us, if we are not careful. If we think that friendship of the world is simply being close friends with worldly people, then we will *always* miss the mark. None of us has close friends that are not members of this church, or in a few instances those who at least make what appears to be a sincere proclamation of faith. So, if we think that is what 'friendship of the world' means, we would normally conclude that this doesn't apply to us – at least at present or to what extent we can know such a thing. I don't think that's what friendship of the world means here. It is far more subtle and harder to detect or even to describe than that. It doesn't come upon someone of a sudden. The characteristics of it are many times hard to see. I believe it takes many forms and ultimately is a matter of having a cumulative effect on a person's mind and heart. With that being said, I believe that friendship of the world is when significant mindshare becomes devoted, over time, to interest, admiration, mental excitement, or inclination towards various elements of this world, such as: systems, processes, ideologies, sights, sounds, personalities, achievements, activities, pursuits, fads, history, social practices, trappings, etc. (I'm sure there are a lot more words and categories to be used here, but I think you get the idea).

The cumulative effect that results in this is, I think, aptly described in logic terms by what is known as the fallacy of the heap, and it goes like this: One grain of sand doesn't make something that wasn't already a heap of sand into a heap of sand. Of course, by that logic, no matter how many grains of sand you would add, you would never get to a heap! And of course that's wrong; you will get to a heap – and it's not tightly defined by how many grains of sand are piled together. Eventually, though, if you keep adding grains, it will become a heap.

I'd like to try to speak to this cumulative effect with a few practical examples. Recently, mom and I watched a documentary about Ruth Bader Ginsberg. The main thrust of the doc was her legal career, of course, and the many ways in which, by that work, the law began to be applied more equally in recognizing women's rights over time. Longstanding problems, and she helped move things along substantially. It was a very interesting, informative and mostly unbiased documentary film. Naturally, Ginsberg's work ethic and personality came through in interviews, anecdotes and words from others. You got glimpses into her personal life, too – and by the end of the doc, I found myself being charmed by her personality, work ethic, seriousness and devotion to what she perceived as social wrongs. She had a dogged determination to help right them. On a grand social scale, her work affected many, many people, and she therefore has the deep appreciation, gratitude, respect and admiration of many, many people. And then I thought - on a grand moral scale - that in her lofty, albeit 'well-earned' positions, she has probably worked more iniquity, for more years, and with longer-lasting damaging consequences than perhaps any other person alive in this nation. Abortion, divorce, so-called 'gay rights,' educational issues, etc. This is a person who, by her relentless legal pursuits, has enabled and encouraged so much sin, of so many stripes, that certainly that blessed verse in Psalm 5 would apply:

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. – Ps. 5:5

Her charm, demeanor and work ethic were laudable – and I felt myself thinking that for more than a moment. At the end of my armchair analysis, I got squared up. But I couldn't help but notice that, during the film, my mind did not stay fixed merely on the iniquity and shame of the whole sea of lies surrounding her – that despite her continual, notorious rebellion against God, I kind of liked her. And that is just one grain of sand.

Then maybe I add to that every so often wondering how my favorite baseball team is doing - I check the scores, listen to the commentary and am briefly amazed by the feats of athleticism that I watch in the game highlights. And I think one of the sports analysts has a good way of explaining things and I really kind of like him. So, then I might begin searching for his views more than the views of others (and of course, Google is right there to begin building a view of the world for me, based upon my browsing history, that I like and then feed it to me as a 'news feed'). Now, there are two grains of sand.

Then maybe I watch a show that I like, "Viking Zombie Throne Game" – and one of you watches a show you like "Better Call Modern, Fag-subplot Kimmie" and we talk about them. You like yours better than mine, and next thing you know (whether outwardly or just on the inside) I'm

like, “Sheesh. What’s wrong with him? Can’t he see how much better ‘ViZTiG’ is than that bucket of cheese he watches?” Three grains.

We sometimes like to pick up trivia about the music groups we like, or scour for techniques of video games we play, or become interested in which politician, or judge, or chef, will do or say what next. Or what crafts are in fashion. Wait a minute? Animal trivia. Palindromes. New Gadgets. Toys that help you learn. Memes. Is this year’s anniversary gift paper or glass? It is literally endless, but I’m done. Hope you start to get the idea. It is part of our nature to always be looking for new things to look at and release the things that have become dull to us.

All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. – Ec. 1:8

Gill: both one and the other (eye and ear) require new objects continually; the pleasure of these senses is blunted by the same objects constantly presented; men are always seeking new ones, and when they have got them they want others; whatever curious thing is to be seen the eye craves it; and, after it has dwelt on it a while, it grows tired of it, and wants something else to divert it; and so the ear is delighted with musical sounds, but in time loses the taste of them, and seeks for others; and in discourse and conversation never easy, unless, like the Athenians, it hears some new things, and which quickly grow stale, and then wants fresh ones still: and indeed the spiritual eye and ear will never be satisfied in this life, until the soul comes into the perfect state of blessedness, and beholds the face of God, and sees him as he is; and sees and hears what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard below.

Please do not get me wrong. I am not picking on anyone’s hobby here or what they watch or read or do or anything like that – I have too many hobbies myself - and I am not making an argument against light entertainment or learning or special interests of any kind. I am not the thought police here. I am merely trying to paint a picture of what friendship of the world might start to look like, over time, if we are not careful. And it is important to look at that. We know we are prone to scour for things to see, read, hear, think on. With all these ideas and images and information laying over each other and intermingling and intertwining and dominating our time and beginning to take up so much of our *mindshare*, how much of that starts to have an ever-so-subtle influence on our *mindset*? Our perspectives on things?

And now, add this color to the picture we are painting here. We each have, in essence, the whole world in our pockets. The number of images, ideas, messages, vicariously-felt experiences, etc., that even our tender, 14 year-old young people have logged to date might outstrip, in number

and variety, the sum total of a person's mental ledger a century or so ago. And, though there is a lot of mischief we can get into in this world, there is a whole lot of it that looks, again on its face, harmless. And if looked upon with a proper perspective, it is. But we constantly inundate ourselves with information, news, history, stories, facts, images, opinions, trends, comings and goings - much of which is informed, shaped, colored and packaged by the worldling. It might not even be the things we see, in themselves, which cause the damage – it sometimes may be merely the ideological residue that begins to cause our sinful and adulterous befriending of the world in some very subtle, pernicious and deceitful ways. Sometimes I think that some of our more regularly-referenced commentators could not see this problem as clearly in the context of their own times and lives. I believe it is an important question that each one of us, to ourselves and by ourselves in the sight of God, should ask: how is my mind, and therefore my heart, being affected by all these things over time? And I think each of us should ask that every so often.

Adultery is unfaithfulness in marriage. A husband wants his wife's attention and faithfulness, and he doesn't want to share her with other people, forces, interests, etc. Spiritual adultery, for my lack of a more eloquent way of putting it, is being married to Christ and yet sometimes dating the world on the sly. And spiritual adultery is directly tied, by the word of God, to friendship of the world. Liking the world. Giving it your attention. Your time. Your *mindshare*. The cares of this world. The affairs of this life. The deceitfulness of riches. The lusts of (many) other things. They choke the word, that it become unfruitful. Our minds potentially become less and less faithful, as our *mindshare* is filled with so many things that each, by themselves, are but a single grain of sand - and none of them are, on their face, sinful. But now we are in danger of being in a heap...of trouble. How we use our minds – what they are attracted to, in what manner we engage them and keep them engaged, is a vital part of our walk in faith. I think we need to become more aware of how our minds are being affected by so many otherwise harmless-looking grains of sand that certainly could not have and never could be formed into an adulterous heap!

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; - 2Cor. 10:5

The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy. Please note the rhetorical question being asked by the Holy Spirit, here. *“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”* In other words, it does *not* say thus in vain, but is tremendously effectual! Some of you might have noticed that, unlike many references in scripture to scripture, there is nowhere earlier in scripture where these words are repeated or even approximated. Many

expositors have been puzzled by this – several offering uncharacteristically unlearned and unscriptural explanations, such as that this piece of scripture was lost, or only included in earlier versions. It's not just *one place* in scripture that says the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy – it is said *throughout* scripture in spades and in many different ways. A few examples:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. - Ge 6:5

... and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...- Ge 8:21

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. - Ga 5:17

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? – Jer. 17:9

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. - Ps 73:3

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit. - Ec. 4:4

Lusting to envy is the strong proclivity in each of us to be driven privately to envy. This runs the gamut from being peeved that your classmate got a better grade on a test, to envying a man for having a wife if you haven't one, to envying a man's positions or prosperity.

Barnes (on James 4:5) : *The idea is, that there is in man a strong inclination to look with dissatisfaction on the superior happiness and prosperity of others; to desire to make what they possess our own...and to that strong worldly ambition which makes us anxious to surpass all others, and which is so hostile to the humble and contented spirit of religion. He who could trace all wars and contentions and worldly plans to their source — all the schemes and purposes of even professed Christians - would be surprised to find how much is to be attributed to envy. We are pained that others are more prosperous than we are; we desire to possess what others have, though we have no right to it; and this leads to the various guilty methods which are pursued to lessen their enjoyment of it, or to obtain it...This purpose will be accomplished if we can obtain more than they have; or if we can (but witness) a diminish(ing of) what they actually possess — for thus the spirit of envy in our bosoms will be gratified.*

Spurgeon: *There is a spirit, resident in the natural man, the human nature of man, which is always inclined toward hate and envy, always wanting to get somewhat from other men, and always grieved if other men seem to be or to have more than the person himself has.*

Henry: *Natural corruption principally shows itself by envying, and there is a continual propensity to this. The spirit which naturally dwells in man is always producing one evil imagination or another.*

There is no question but that our baser natures, constantly intermingling with the world, will never produce a total lack of envy. We are prone to it. Some people more than others, but all prone. The scripture makes us aware of our baser natures, and we ought to be keenly aware of that – only by such awareness, rather than denial, can we see more clearly the manifest needs that we have for Christ in SO MANY ways, in SO MANY moments – every moment we need His word, His power, His mercy, His longsuffering, His presence, His WISDOM!

Of course, the remedy to the awful realization that we are spiritual adulterers is given right there in that cluster of verses.

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. – James 4:6-10

He giveth more grace. He gives us grace to overcome our spiritual adultery, moment by moment. But our hearts are prone to wander, so we must constantly ask for it, nothing wavering. And though it be true that we are spiritual adulterers and adulteresses, the Lord doesn't lay that to our charge, by the blood of the Lamb. We are admonished and encouraged to look at the stark reality of our disloyalty to help guide us in our walk. Our laughter should be continually turned to mourning in that recognition. There is no rejoicing in the efficacious, salvific act of our Christ and His power to perform all that he has purposed without a stark recognition of the absolute necessity of it in our hearts. Only then can we properly see the 'doing' of the word as not servile; but bursting forth from our hearts as that which we must do in humble, shameful thanksgiving that we don't do it oftener and with more zeal and simplicity.

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. – James 1:25

We are all almost always hears of the word. The notions delight our minds when we hear them, to the extent that we understand them. But we are hearers only, and not doers, when something in this world has pulled our mind away from what should be dominating our mindshare. Doing requires the proper perspective in the doing of it – else, we do the right things for the wrong reasons (e.g., submitting unto Him, humbling ourselves in His sight, etc.). Of the beautiful dichotomies put forth in 2Cor. 6 – this one speaks to this issue squarely on the head:

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. – 2Cor. 6:10

This dual set of emotions should ever reign in our hearts - sorrow and rejoicing are laid over one another, as happening at the same time and always (when we are thinking right): We should be admonished by these words of life and truth in James, and sorrow over our sin, our faithlessness, our adultery against our Beloved – our laughter being turned unto mourning. And yet we rejoice in the faithfulness, love, mercy, strength, power and wisdom of our Beloved – that by our faithful Beloved’s love for us we have the lively hope of being saved from our wretched, miserable selves by the only power that can do that. Amazing.

It is quite a powerful list of things we are commanded to do there in James 4:6-10 – and one of them seems to galvanize all the rest together, at least to my mind: to draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you. How do we do that, and doesn’t that chiefly have to do with our mindshare? How can we draw nigh unto God in our hearts (in love) if we always have other things on our minds (in interest)?

Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. – Pr. 4:7

This is a very interesting turn of a phrase. ‘Wisdom’ there means God Himself, and also the things of God (that have been revealed unto us). That ‘getting’ means all your pursuits and acquisitions. Gill: *let not Christ be wanting; he is the one thing needful, the good and better part and portion, which, if missing, all other substance signifies little: or part with all for this pearl of great price, Wisdom, and prefer it to all worldly substance; look upon all but dross in comparison of Christ and the knowledge of him: all other gettings or substance are only for the body, this for the soul, and the eternal welfare of it.* That ‘understanding’ means practical discernment (2Tim. 2:15 – rightly dividing the word of truth).

Clarke has some really good stuff on this verse: *"wisdom is the principle thing;" It is the punctum saliens (the source and origin of life and activity) in all religion to know the true God, and what*

he requires of man, and for what he has made man; and to this must be added, under the Christian dispensation, to know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and for what end HE was sent, the necessity of his being sent, and the nature of that salvation which he has bought by his own blood.

“therefore get wisdom.” Consider this as thy chief gain; that in reference to which all thy wisdom, knowledge, and endeavours should be directed.

“and with all thy getting” - Let this be thy chief property. While thou art passing through things temporal, do not lose those things which are eternal; and, while diligent in business, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

“get understanding.” - Do not be contented with the lessons of wisdom merely; do not be satisfied with having a sound religious creed; devils believe and tremble; but see that thou properly comprehend all that thou hast learnt; and see that thou rightly apply all that thou hast been taught. Wisdom prescribes the best end, and the means best calculated for its attainment. Understanding directs to the ways, times, places, and opportunities of practicing the lessons of wisdom. Wisdom points out the thing requisite; understanding sees to the accomplishment and attainment.

Would you save for later a letter received from a dearly beloved person who is away and who you greatly desire to hear from? If you're cooking a meal, don't most of you consult a recipe and then follow it carefully (at least until you are intimately familiar with it)? Or when you are putting something together, like a bike or a cabinet, don't you consult the instructions when you get stuck? Or read up carefully before using a potentially dangerous piece of equipment for the first time? Or find out what is going on in the life of some newsworthy person that we have interest in? Why would we then not jump at every chance to turn to the word of God?

We should delight in every opportunity to read the words that our Beloved wrote to us. We should want to read them over and over again, not look upon them in the abstract. Though we become frustrated or perplexed should we get confused by reading in a spot that we don't know a lot of the backdrop for, we should first ask God for wisdom on that topic, ask for help from others and use that notion of our relative ignorance to spur us on to patiently get a better understanding of a thing over time. When we are thinking right, wisdom is the principal thing, so we should get it and we should therefore with all our getting get understanding. Is that not drawing nigh unto God?

Drawing nigh unto God means getting wisdom. Not in hearing only, but in doing; and therefore, in becoming. That the word of God would become the warp and woof of us is a great calling! (On a practical level, it is a very good thing to have a personal reading plan and to stick to it, regardless of what other reading you do with others). Drawing nigh unto God means praying way more than we do. In private. In earnest. Confessing our sins, asking for help, praising His name and thanking Him for those things that you feel most grateful for at that hour. Drawing nigh unto God means giving God the bulk of your mindshare. Time. Contemplation. Focus. Drawing nigh unto God might mean going on an internet diet or limiting the amount of time you spend doing those things that you know draw the mind away from God – in a heartbeat. Drawing nigh unto God means quieting our minds to receive that which is vital to us and seeking God’s face in earnest. Drawing nigh unto God is the specific remedy given to spiritual adulterers and adulteresses, in terms of what we can actually perform. Therefore, we are called to draw nigh unto God in every way that we can. The charge at James 4 is perhaps hard to take at first, but we know in our hearts it is true, and the remedy provided is altogether excellent and instructive. I hope that something here has been edifying and useful to you.

I love you. Amen.