

Sermon by Canon Jim Holbeck at the Healing Service at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney,
Wed 21 June 2006

Reading: James 4: 1- 10. Topic: "It Is The Humble Who Receive From God."

As we left Chapter 3 last week the lingering word was "peace". *Jas3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* But the world isn't a peaceful place. Our own hearts and minds may not be at peace. So how can we know peace as individuals and as a society?

James gives us the answer. He shows us why we are not at peace and then shows us the way to have peace.

1. WHY WE QUARREL AND FIGHT. 1-3

4:1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

a). Where it comes from. Within us. *your passions are at war within you.* It's something within the human heart. He writes that it comes out of our desires, our passions, that are at war within us. In its more violent expression, he says we "desire and do not have", so we "kill to get what we want." We "covet and can't obtain, so we fight and wage war." We have an enemy within, our old nature, the nature we were born with which Paul calls *the flesh*. When we are born again as Christians, it doesn't mean that that old nature is taken away but that God gives us a new nature, in addition to the old nature which remains. This new nature is always inclined to godliness, because it is in the image of Christ. So there's always going to be an inner battle, as the old nature wants to rebel against the new nature God has given us. As Paul wrote in Gal 5:17, "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." As someone has said, The Christian is A Walking Civil War. (our passions are at war within us).

b). The effects it has. No answers to prayer

i). We don't ask. Because we're arrogant or proud. We feel we can cope without anyone else's help, and in our pride we spurn the help that God or other people can give us.

I think of 2 people over the years whom I asked if they would like me to pray for them. The first a woman was on her way for a final examination with her surgeon before the scheduled operation. We prayed and she went off to the specialist. He examined her and said he could not go ahead with the operation because her jaw healed. She could go home. The second was a friend with a problem with his voice so that he could no longer lecture. I plucked up courage and asked *Would you like me to pray with you.* I remember his blunt reply. *No thank you, I'll take my chances.* Years later he still had the problem. What might have happened if he had asked for help? I don't know but what I do know is that we need to be humble enough to ask for help especially from God.

ii). Our motives in asking are wrong. (Verse 3)

Our requests can be motivated from unworthy motives such as selfishness or covetousness. We want what we want rather than wanting what we need. It could be anything in life that we want, Eg., status, recognition, praise, riches etc. God loves to meet our real needs, not our arrogant wants. It applies even to healing. Why do you want to be healed? Is our motive in wanting healing a selfish motive. *Please heal me so that I can get on and do what I want to do in life with less pain and more mobility.* But the focus is on you and what you want and not on Him. I encourage you to pray a prayer like this one, *Lord please me for Your sake so that I can do Your will to Your glory for the rest of my life.* That's an unselfish prayer that wants healing to do the will of God not our own will.

2. THE CHOICE. FRIENDS OF THE WORLD OR OF GOD? 4-6

4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. The way to become what God wants us to become, is to recognise the inner antagonism we may have to God's rule over our lives. Then we need to turn from that arrogant worldly attitude and be open to receive the gifts of God's

grace. As verse 6 puts it, "God opposes the proud (who have no time for Him), but gives grace to the humble." Are we humble? What's it mean to be humble?

3. SUBMISSION TO GOD IN HUMILITY. WHAT IT INVOLVES. V7-10

7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

a). Actively submitting ourselves to God. v7. If there is a creator then I need to submit to Him as my creator and to find His purpose for my life. If there is an Almighty God of this world, then we should be subject to Him as the God of all power. Humans are in rebellion. Adam and Eve failed to submit themselves to God and disobeyed his commandment to them. Because of their sin of rebellion they were thrown out of the garden, and sin and rebellion entered the human race.

Since then, all of us as part of a fallen humanity have a problem with temptation. Thus we need to "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." God is telling us to do the exact opposite of what Adam and Eve did in the garden. (They didn't submit to God. They didn't resist the devil, but acted on the lies he fed them. They didn't draw near to God, but hid from Him in their rebellion and guilt.) You and I are not naturally submissive to God. It takes an initial step of commitment to submit to Him as Saviour and Lord, and an ongoing daily, hourly, moment by moment commitment to Him.

b). Resisting the devil. v7. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Why do we need to resist?

i). **Because he tries to control or oppress us.** He tries to dominate or control (Peter spoke about Jesus in Acts 10:38 *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.* "Oppressed" is *katadunasteu*,. *Kata emphasises the verb, dunasteu (from which we get dynasty) is to control.* The devil doesn't respect our free-will but tries to control us, to manipulate us for his own evil purposes.

God gives us free-will and doesn't barge into our lives but waits until we open our lives to Him and then He comes in Almighty power working with our will not against it as long as we remain open to Him.

ii). **Because he tries to destroy us.** *1 Pet 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith. Satan would like to destroy you because he hates everyone who is made in the image of the God he detests. That's you and me.*

iii). **Because he wants to hold us in bondage to him.** The writer to Hebrews wrote, *Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.* When we take our stand based on what Jesus has done for us, we no longer have to fear death. So we can stand in the victory Christ won for us on the cross and thus *Resist the devil, and the devil will flee from us.*

c). Drawing near to God. v8. *8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

God has given us free will. We can choose to submit to Him or not. We can choose to approach Him or not.

God spoke to the exiles in Babylon through Jeremiah in Jer 29:12 *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord,*

Jesus invited people to come to Him for spiritual satisfaction. Jn 7:37 *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as [6] the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Many of His own people wouldn't come to Him, Jn 5:39-40 *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.* You and I may have a Bible that tells about how Jesus can give us new life but we need to come and submit to Him to receive that life.

God has taken the initiative in doing everything for our salvation in His Son Jesus Christ. He wants us to respond by now taking the initiative to come to Him for help. If we come near to Him He will come near to us. Mat 11:28-30 28 *Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” If we don’t come to Him there can be no rest from the burdens we carry especially the burdens of sin and guilt, nor can there be any ongoing fellowship with Him.

d). Truly repenting of our sin. v9. *Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*

Sin in any form is an abomination in the sight of God. None of us realise how horrific is sin in the sight of God and we fail to recognise the damage that it does to those who sin and to those who are sinned against.

What we need is a genuine heartfelt repentance. It’s more than remorse or regret. True repentance recognises the sinfulness of sin, confessing it before God and asking His forgiveness and His help to turn away from it and to never do it again. We ask God to cleanse us outwardly and to purify us inwardly as well that we might become the genuine article. As we open our lives to Him He brings about the conviction of our sin by His Spirit and He makes us feel wretched as a means of getting us to confess our sine and to ask for forgiveness and cleansing. I once saw with my own eyes a well-known atheist who had just read some Bible passages a short time before come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit so that he felt so wretched he staggered up to me shaking like a leaf and saying, *It’s all true isn’t it? What have I go to do to be saved.*” I introduced him to Jesus and from that moment Jesus transformed that man’s life in a way that amazed those who had known him.

4. GOD’S BLESSING ON THOSE WHO HUMBLE THEMSELVES BEFORE HIM. V10

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. We have a choice. Either we humble ourselves before God so that He can exalt us, or if we choose to carry on in our arrogance and pride, He will humble us. What choice would you like to make tonight? Carry on like the rest of the world in its arrogance and pride ignoring God and His love. Or would you be willing to humble yourself to submit your life to God. That is a prayer of commitment to Jesus as you submit to God. The other is a prayer that I will lead you in as you ask God to heal you for His sake so that you can do His will for the rest of your life. The second is not written but please join me in praying it. *Heavenly Father, I humbly ask that you might heal me for your sake so that I can do Your will to Your glory for the rest of my life. AMEN*