**St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Perth**

**Sunday, September 29th, 2024**

**Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Faith: God or the World**

**Proper 21**

**James 4: 1-10**

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Here God speaks to us words of challenge and comfort.

**Here Jesus stands among us, calling us to acts of mercy.**

Even now, the Holy Spirit is moving in our midst,

**filling us with hope and inspiring us to faithfulness.**

Let us worship God, ever Three and ever One.

**Let us praise God’s holy name together!**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

All Knowing Father,

beauty and harmony mark your creation.

As the seasons change,

we see you are still at work in the world,

transforming hearts and situations.

We praise you for all you do to heal this world

to bring peace to places of conflict,

working for goodness to prevail.

You offer us new possibilities day by day,

and so we place our trust in your redeeming power.

Renew our energy for mission this autumn

and open our eyes to new opportunities to reach out in Jesus’ name.

Through the power of the Spirit, make us participants in your work,

bringing justice and joy into the world you love.

**Amen.**

**Children’s Hymn**

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!

Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Gracious God,**

**our sins are too heavy to carry,**

**too real to hide,**

**and too deep to undo.**

**Forgive what our lips tremble to name,**

**what our hearts can no longer bear,**

**and what has become for us**

**a consuming fire of judgment.**

**Set us free from a past that we cannot change;**

**open to us a future in which we can be changed;**

**and grant us grace**

**to grow more and more in your likeness and image;**

**through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

The prophet Micah declared that God requires of us three things:

to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

To all who repent, who act for justice and seek to serve God and neighbour in kindness,

God offers forgiveness and peace.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.**

**For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,**

**Forever and ever. Amen.**

**Hymn: “I Sing Praises”**

I sing praises to Your name, O Lord   praises to your name, O Lord

For your name is great and greatly to be praised

I sing praises to Your name, O Lord praises to your name, O Lord

For Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

I give glory to Your name, O Lord glory to your anime, O Lord

for your name is great and greatly to be praised.

I give glory to Your name, O Lord glory to your name, O Lord

for Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

I give honour to Your name, O Lord honour to your name, O Lord

For your name is great and greatly to be praised

I give honour to Your name, O Lord honour to your name O Lord

For Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

**Responsive Reading**

**Psalm 119: 17-24**

**17**Deal bountifully with your servant,

that I may live and keep your word.

**18Open my eyes, that I may behold**

**wondrous things out of your law.**

**19**I am a sojourner on the earth;

hide not your commandments from me!

**20My soul is consumed with longing**

**for your rules at all times.**

**21**You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones,

who wander from your commandments.

**22Take away from me scorn and contempt,**

**for I have kept your testimonies.**

**23**Even though princes sit plotting against me,

your servant will meditate on your statutes.

**24Your testimonies are my delight;**

**they are my counselors.**

**Anthem (Music Ministry): “Live in Praise of the Lord”**

**Prayer for illumination**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Scripture**

**James 4: 1-10**

**4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4You 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. 5Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? 6But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

**Sermon**

As we continue on in the book of James, we are entering a section where James deals with human nature and how it goes against the way in which God wants us to be. Today we are going to look at the two ways of the world which often are promoted by the world and cause us

to have separation from God; pride and selfishness.

Unfortunately pride and selfishness are often driving factors in our lives, and because of the world around us, that teaches us to be who we want and get what we want at whatever the cost, pride and selfishness, often cause us to act in ungodly ways as we seek to get the things we desire in this world.

Don’t worry, James was not writing this to just us or other future generations of Christians. He was actually writing it to the people of his day. Many of the Jews of Jesus’s day were filled with pride and selfishness. They were the people of God after all, and they were filled with political unrest and dissatisfied with their lives living under the rulership of the morally and ethically corrupt Roman government. In fact, Barbaras, the man who was saved from execution when Jesus took his place on the cross, was a leader in the Jewish rebellion against Rome, and he led military and guerrilla style warfare against the people he saw as occupier of Jewish land. In his mind and the mind of many Jews of the time, God had promised them that land from the time of their father Abraham, and it was their right to take that land back in any way they could, even if it meant burning down building, stealing from gentiles, or even murdering their enemies.

James is saying that this type of behavior is wrong. Showing that their idea of the land belonging to them and the way in which they are trying to take control of it is not driven by God, but instead by their own pride and selfish desires.

James is attempting to teach them that God works through his people, and yes in the past he has led the Israelites to great military victories, but this time he is doing something different. James is trying to bring it to the attention of early Christians, and us today, that God works through the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we need to give our hearts and minds to him first if we want to be part of the way in which he is building his kingdom.

**James 4: 1-4**

**4 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4You 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.**

James starts by telling us those things which separate us from doing God’s work in this world. Things which embrace the ways of the world and deny the ways of God, causing strife in our relationship with God and with others.

The first human behavior that James speaks about is our desire to follow our own selfish desires. We need to recognize that our selfish desires are a major driving factor in our lives.

The Minnesota Crime Commission did a report on what they discovered about humankinds’ selfish desires.

They said, ‘Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it — his bottle, his mother’s attention, his playmate’s toy, his uncle’s watch. Deny him these once, and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children — not just certain children — are born delinquents. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free rein to his impulsive actions to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal — a thief, a killer, or a rapist.’

We all follow our inner selfishness at times and just do what we want to get those things we desire. This means we will at times choose to ignore God’s Word, especially those parts that interfere with our enjoyment of our own lives.

A side effect of this pride and selfishness is that we will often get into fights with others, either verbally or physically until we get those things we desire in this world. We will try to force our will and our way of thinking on others. We are willing to step on or sacrifice anyone along the way to getting the things we are after in this world. We are only willing to invest time in people who we think we can get something out of, or people who can help us along our way.

We begin to avoid or even go up against anyone who disagrees with us, after all we know we are correct and everyone else must be wrong. In essence, when we let pride and selfishness rule our lives, we are willing to push the envelope, to argue, be abusive, manipulating or controlling, even demanding and overbearing as long as it helps us get our way. And that means we will often be willing to use violence if we deem it is necessary to remove an obstacle from our path to what we desire.

 We also live in a world where we are told we can be anything we want and have anything we desire if we are willing to go after it hard enough. Which plays into our pride and selfishness. We begin to believe we deserve the things we desire. We covet the things others have, and the world says we can have them too if we are willing to do whatever it takes to get them.

‘whatever it takes’

That is the problem, because that ‘whatever it takes’ is what leads so many people down a path of sin, whether it is selling their body, committing crimes like, theft or murder, in essence selling their soul to get the things of this world and in the process giving up their eternal life for fleeting happiness.

King Ahab is a Biblical example of how this happens. He was a King of Israel, and he decided one day that he wanted the beautiful vineyards of Naboth that were close to his palace. He offered Naboth a fair price for the vineyard, but Naboth refused his offer because the land had sentimental value, it had been in his family for many generations.

So, Ahab began to complain to his wife about Naboth refusing to sell the vineyard. And his wife, a name you might recognize, Jezebel, plotted a scheme to falsely accuse Naboth of cursing the king and God, and then to have him killed for his blasphemy.

It worked, Naboth was dead, and Ahab had all his heart desired.

However, God had seen his wicked ways and Elijah was sent to Ahab to pronounce judgement on his for his wickedness.

**1 Kings 21: 20-24**

**20Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. 21Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. 22And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. 23And of Jezebel the Lord also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’ 24Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.”**

This is the way of man, the way of the world, a way which leads us away from God and into his condemnation. When we let our own pride and selfishness guide how we live, when we let our own feelings and understandings of the world determine our path, we are walking the road to destruction.

James does not stop there; he reminds us that we too often rely on our own understanding of the world and refuse to turn to him for help. God answers every prayer we make, in his own way and in his own perfect time.

The issue is that we often do not pray or choose to pray in the wrong way and with the wrong motivations. It is true that we often don’t know how we should pray for something or about something that is happening in our lives, however, we need to know that it is better to pray wrong, than to not pray at all. There is always a chance for us to hear what God is saying to us if we are in communication with him. But if we never talk to him, how can he respond to us? If you don’t ask, don’t tell and don’t pray, you can guarantee that your prayers will never be answered.

James also makes it a point to mention that we often turn our prayers into messages of our selfish passions. Simply put, we pray for the things we want and when God does not give them to us in the timeline we have laid out, we often run off and try to obtain those things in another way. We treat God like a magic lamp, if we rub it correctly the genie might pop out and grant us our three wishes. That is not how prayer works.

King Solomon was one of the very few people who ever received his desires from God. In fact, in the book of Kings God appears to Solomon in a dream and tells him ‘Ask and I shall give you.’

So, what did king Solomon ask for? Great riches, beautiful wives, unmatched power?

**1 Kings 3: 6-9**

**6And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. 7And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. 8And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. 9Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”**

Wisdom, a discerning heart is what King Solomon desired. A way to better look after God’s people not his own selfish desires. God saw this and

**1 Kings 3:10-14**

**10It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11And God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, 12behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. 13I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. 14And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”**

So, James is reminding us that when we ask God for all of the things we want in this world, the things which bring us pleasure and power in this life, that we are being prideful and selfish and we should not be surprised when God does not answer us.

In fact, James calls our pride and selfishness spiritual adultery – unfaithfulness to the Lord our God.

When we are believers, we are called to be faithful to the Lord and all of his commands, and when we give into the world, we are being unfaithful to God. And there are some people in this world who have developed such a bond with the world and its ways that they are actually hostile to the ways of God. They begin to adopt so many of the worldly ways into their lives, embracing them because they give them the things they desire in the here and now, that they begin to draw lines in their relationship with God, allowing God into some parts of their lives and not others.

James calls this spiritual adultery, they are flirting with, chasing after and becoming intimate with the world, which is destroying the loving relationship and trust they had with God.

James is telling us to explore where our affections lie. Where are our connections, are they to God or are they to the world? Do we pursue God or do we pursue the things of this world. What is our first focus with our money, giving $5 to the church to help God’s kingdom grow, or that Starbucks we think we need to make it through the day. Are we trading the things we have today for something that is eternal, or things that will not last and do not actually satisfy?

He finally says, ‘**that friendship with the world is enmity with God**.’

Luckily James does not stop there, he is about to explain that when we respond to the mercy and grace of God and humble ourselves in repentance that we are willing to give up the ways of man and of this world. It is only when we give up our feelings and understanding of how things should be and walk in the ways of the Scripture that we are no longer driven by our own desires, but instead are motivated by what God wants. It is only when we repent and obey that we are living out the words, ‘**Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**’ Which is what James is going to talk about next.

**James 4: 5-10**

**5Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? 6But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 7Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

We need to recognize that we are all opposed to God because of our sinful nature, and only then can we recognize the value of the grace and mercy he has offered us. God loved us all so much that he died for our sinful lives, before we even acknowledged who he was to us.

This is why God opposes the proud. Pride creates a barrier between God and people. Pride puts us at odds with God because we believe we are correct, and God must be wrong. Pride causes so much of the turmoil and trouble we see in the world, yet we all easily fall prey to its grasp in our lives.

James is telling us we need to set aside all of our pride, there is no room for pride in the heart of a Christian. That we need to be willing to humbly submit ourselves to the Lord our God.

We need to be willing to surrender who we are and become who God is calling us to be, and that means we need to understand that God might call us to change, sometime radically, from believing one thing to obeying the Scriptures in our lives.

When we humbly submit to God and surrender our lives to him in all things and in all ways, we begin to understand that we are nothing without him. He is the one who created the universe, who controls all things and will determine our eternal fate. Why would we not submit ourselves to him in this life?

We would be foolish to take matters into our own hands, after all what can we do, instead we humbly submit ourselves into the Lord’s hands, trusting in his ways to make things happen according to His will, and that will often mean that things do not go the way that we want them to, but instead go the way that God intends them to in our lives.

James then reminds us of the advisory, the devil, who will come along and try to get us to once again take up our pride and selfishness. The devil will try to tempt us away from humbling submitting to God’s Word.

Think to the ways in which Satan tried to tempt Christ. He offered him food when he was hungry, he challenged him to test the will of God by jumping off a high ledge and forcing the angels to save him and offered him unlimited earthly wealth and power if he would just bow down to him. Satan was trying to use the Word of God, by twisting it slightly, and in doing so bend Jesus to his will in this world.

 In every instance Jesus resisted the devil by turning to the Word of God, faithfully and truthfully.

This is what we must do, faithfully and truthfully examine our lives in the light of the Lord’s Word. Knowing that it will shine on some dark aspects of our life which we will eventually have to admit are sinful, and with the help of the Lord we need to resist temptation and to turn away from the devil’s influence in our lives.

James is reminding us that we cannot entertain both God and the Devil in our hearts, that is spiritual adultery, and in the end if we choose to entertain the devil, he will always hinder us, and cause chaos and destruction in our lives. It is only when we resist him through the Word of God that he will flee.

We need to seek out the Lord in our lives. We need to pursue his ways, read his Word and speak with him freely. The closer we draw to God the closer God is to us. And we need to understand that this might take us places we are not ready to go to at times. God’s call on our lives changes us and will call us to serve him in the way that he needs us, not always in the way we want to serve.

Our relationship with God is what will help us overcome all of the sin in our lives. And the sin in our live is what hinders our relationship with God. James says, ‘**Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded**’. We need to stop editing the word of God to say what we want it to say, we need to quit skipping over the parts of the scripture we do not like and accept that we are sinners and begin the task of removing that sin from our lives.

Any sin we embrace in our lives is something that sits between us and our relationship with the Lord. We need to wash our hand of the sins we have committed and purify our hearts in the living water of God’s Word.

**1 John 1:9-10**

**9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.**

We either admit our sin truthfully to God in our lives, or we make God a liar.

So, we need to learn to admit our sin, even the sins we love to hide from God and from the world and repent from them. If we do not admit our sin, then we will never feel the need to repent and we will never give up the pride and selfishness that we have.

James is saying that as God’s faithful children we need to humble ourselves fully. We need to see ourselves before God as we really are, tiny and weak. And as we drink from his grace and his mercy it should only generate more humility in our lives because we recognize how undeserving we are, and how blessed we are because of his love.

We need to empty our lives of our pride, our selfishness, our anger, our envy, of the idea that we deserve anything, the promise that we are given is that when we do this the Lord will lift us up. God is the one who will look after us, he will do the heavy lifting in our lives when we submit ourselves to his ways. The only lifting that we are called to do is to lift our eyes to Jesus and our hearts and hands to God in praise and worship.

God is calling each of us to be closer to him. To empty ourselves of selfishness, pride, envy and desire. To call upon him for great things, not our of selfishness, but to serve him better and to glorify his name in this world. He wants us to share our life with him, not try to live it on our own, and when we do, he will help us to resist the temptations of the devil in our lives. We need to be honest with ourselves and honest with God about who we are and how we live, and when we do so, when we get closer to him, he will lead us and direct our lives in his ways as we walk as the Salt and Light of his Word in this world.

Let us pray,

**Grant Us Your Holy Spirit to Protect Us**

Lord God, heavenly Father,

through your Son you promised us

that whatever we ask in his name you will give us.

Keep us in your Word

and grant us your Holy Spirit,

that he may govern us according to your will,

protect us from the power of the devil,

from false doctrine and false worship.

Defend our lives against all danger

and grant us your blessing and peace,

that we may in all things

know your merciful help

and praise and glorify you as our gracious Father

now and forever;

through your Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one true God, now and forever.

*Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Easter 5, Rogate*

**Hymn: “Night Song”**

In the darkness God will keep me He will stay and never sleep

In the darkness God is brighter though the night is long and deep.

CHORUS

All this day Your hand has held me God of Heaven by my side

Thank you, Father, for your goodness You will hold me through the night.

In the shadows You are with me and You know my every fear

In the shadows none can harm me for the mighty God is here. (Chorus)

So, I find my rest in Jesus He who came to rescue me

Jesus saved me from the darkness I will rise to life with Him. (Chorus)

**Invitation to Offering**

**Offering**

**Offertory Prayer**

**(Congregant Prepared)**

**Closing Hymn: “Blessed Be Your Name”**

Blessed be your name in the land that is plentiful where Your streams of abundance flow.

blessed be your name.

Blessed be your name when I'm found in the desert place though I walk through the wilderness blessed be your name.

Pre chorus

Every blessing you pour out I'll turn back to praise

When the darkness closes in, Lord still I will say.

Chorus

Blessed be the name of the Lord Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be the name of the Lord Blessed be Your glorious name.

Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me when the world's all as it should be.

Blessed be Your name.

Blessed be your name on the road marked with suffering though there's pain in the offering.

Blessed be Your Name.

Pre chorus

Chorus X 2

**Pastoral Prayer**

Loving God,

together we have heard you speak to us,

welcoming us, forgiving us,

teaching us, challenging us.

And we have responded to you

with praise and confession,

listening to your Word,

praying in thanksgiving and intercession,

and committing ourselves to you anew.

It has been good to be together.

As we prepare to leave this place,

we await your blessing

so that we may be comforted

by the assurance that you will

be with us during the coming week.

Continue to speak to us as we seek your face.

Guide us by your Holy Spirit.

Keep us close to you, we pray,

in every aspect of our daily lives,

that we may seek your honor and glory

wherever we are and in whatever we do.

We pray, anticipating your blessing,

for we pray in the name of Jesus,

our Savior and Lord., who lives and rules

with you and the Holy Spirit as the one true God. **Amen.**

**Benediction**

May the grace of God,

freely given through Christ, our Lord,

and sufficient for all our needs,

and may the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

who testifies with our spirit

that we are God’s children,

guide and sustain us this day

and forever. **Amen.**