

The Who is You

by Harrison Conley

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If you have your Bible, why don't you pull it out and find James 4? If you are new to Cottonwood or maybe you haven't been here in a few weeks, we have been in a series since the beginning of the year called "What Really Matters." What we're doing is going verse by verse through the book of James and examining his letter written to believers all over the planet. Many of you would be familiar with who James is. He is one of our early New Testament Church fathers. He's the half-brother of Jesus. He was the lead pastor at the Church of Jerusalem, which was the first church ever established in the history of the world. He writes with the purpose of letting believers know these are the things in the Christian life that really matter.

So, for the last few weeks, we've been diving into these things and examining what James has to say. If you were here last week, here is a bit of a recap. We left off in chapter 3, and James writes about what a life of godly wisdom looks like. He says it looks like integrity, where our words and our actions are in alignment. He says a life of godly wisdom looks like holiness, where we submit to God's sanctifying and maturing work on the inside of us. Then he says a life of godly wisdom looks like humility. Where in light of what Jesus has done for us and in light of what Jesus continues to do for us, we have a proper assessment of ourselves. As we have that proper assessment, we're then able to live in harmony and get along with those around us.

This morning, we're going to step into chapter 4. Just be warned that this is a heavy passage. We have a lot that we have to cover. But I feel like before anything, we have to start with the reading of God's Word. The reason for that is because if the rest of the message goes downhill from here, if the rest of the message tanks from here, at least we can get to the end and say, "Hey, we started with God's Word." So, if you have your Bible, turn to James 4:1–17 ESV. He writes and says this,

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. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 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. ⁵ Or 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"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

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. 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. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. ¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? ¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today

The Who is You

or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

That is the Word of the Lord. In other words, that's what God wants to communicate to us today. Anything I say past this point is just a cherry on top. That is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray,

Father, we come to You, and we want to say thank You for Your Word. Thank You that It's living, breathing, and active, and It's sharper than any two-edged sword. Thank You that Your Word is perfect, and It's inerrant. Thank You that heaven and earth are going to pass away, but Your Word is going to stand the test of time. Thank You for exalting Your Word even above Your name. Even now, Lord, as I endeavor to teach Your Word, I realize Your Holy Spirit is actually the Great Teacher. So, Holy Spirit, would You anoint me so that I might speak as an oracle of God, so Jesus would be honored, glorified, and lifted high in this place? It's in His name we pray. Amen, amen, amen.

You probably noticed, but from the outset, James addresses a really touchy subject. Right there, in verse number one, he begins by asking a really poignant, yet rhetorical question. Rhetorical in the sense that he's not asking his readers to lift their hand and answer the question that he asks. As a matter of fact, he gets right to work answering his own question. But again, I think we need to be warned. Before we examine the answer, we have to know that it's going to shoot at our hearts like an arrow. Here's the question that James asks, and it's a question that we need to all personally consider.

In verse number one, he asks, “What causes quarrels, and what causes fights among you?” Now, in considering this question, if you're anything like me, at first glance, I look at this, and I go, “Hey, James! It seems like maybe, just maybe, you're asking this question incorrectly. Maybe it's not so much of a ‘what’ causes quarrels and fights among you, James. Perhaps, it should be ‘who’ causes fights and quarrels among you. Because if it's a ‘who,’ I know the answer. It's my spouse. She's always on my case. Maybe the ‘who’ is my boss; he never appreciates all the hard work that I put in. Maybe the ‘who’ that causes fights and quarrels are my kids. They never do what I say.”

How about this one? “Maybe the ‘who’ is my mother-in-law; she causes fights and quarrels because she's always meddling and inserting herself where she does not belong. So yeah, James, I don't think it's so much a ‘what’ causes fights and quarrels as much as it's a ‘who’ that causes fights and quarrels.” To which James would say, “Not so fast!” I think James would say, “You're only partially right. It is a ‘who,’ but the ‘who’ is not who you think it is. The ‘who’ is you.” If you're taking notes this morning, I want to entitle this message “The Who is You.” I know it's a bit Dr. Seuss, but maybe we could say it all together this morning? Would you say it with me? “The who is you. The who is you.”

What we're going to see here is that according to James, the source of division, the source of quarreling, the source of fighting is actually something going on inside of me. It's not something going on with my boss or my mother-in-law. Even though we think, “Hey, if they would just see things my way, which of course is the right way, then everyone would get along, and we'd all live in harmony.” James would say, “If you really think that, then your life is going to be in

The Who is You

constant chaos because you're missing the point. You're missing the root issue." James would say the real issue is not something out there. The real issue is something in here, in our hearts. I'm telling you, church if we can capture the truth of what James is trying to convey, it has the potential to change everything. Let's look back at the text. In verse one, he says, "What causes quarrels, and what causes fights among you?" Now, he's going to give the answer. He says, "Is it not this that your passions are at war within you?" I love how Eugene Peterson translates this verse in The Message. He says it like this in James 4:1-2 MSG

¹⁻² Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves.

So according to this verse, the reason we fight, and there's strife and division among us, is because there's something we want that we are not getting. "I just want respect from him, and I'm not getting it. I just want my kids to listen and obey, but they're not doing it. I just want to be recognized and acknowledged for all of my hard work, but I'm not receiving it. And because I'm not receiving it, I'm upset, and I'm frustrated. Everybody I talk to, everybody who sees my plight, everybody who hears my side of the story agrees with me."

Look, I get it. However, according to the Scriptures, the root of the problem is not something out there. It's in here. James says it's because we're not getting what we want. Let's try to break this down and make it practical. I'll give you a scenario. Let's say I'm at work. I've been working really hard, and there's a promotion that comes up. I am the only one qualified for said promotion. I put my name into the hat, but instead of getting the promotion that I earned, it goes to somebody else who's unqualified for that position.

Here's another one. Maybe this will hit close to home for some because I know there are a lot of people working in real estate. Maybe you're that real estate agent, and you worked your tail off. You sold a home, but that commission you made off of selling the home now has to be split amongst the whole team, even though you did all of the work. Now, you're frustrated, and whether you realize it or not, according to Scripture, the grounds for fighting and quarreling have begun to brew within you. I know your response because it would be the same as mine. "Yes, but I earned that commission. I earned that promotion." We want to get what we earned, but we're not getting what we earned. So, we're not getting what we want. Could it be that at least part of the problem is me?

Let me give you another scenario to consider. If you are a parent with multiple kids, you should resonate with this one. I cannot tell you how many times I have been driving in my car, and my kids start to fight in the backseat. I have three boys, so things tend to escalate quite quickly. If you put the three of them in a close space, it turns into a Category 3 hurricane in 5.2 seconds. I don't know about you, but when I find myself in that situation, and my kids are fighting in the car, I do one of these. With one hand on the wheel, eyes on the road, and with the other free hand, I'm just swinging it in the backseat, trying to make contact with anything that I can.

I'm like, "Hey! Stop it! Stop touching each other! Stop talking! Don't make me pull over this car!" To which of course, the kids start pointing fingers at each other and blaming each other. They go, "It's him! No, it's him! No, it's him! He keeps touching me. He keeps bugging me. He keeps messing with me!" Does anybody know what I'm talking about? So, as parents, at this point, what do we do? Well, we certainly don't let them talk one by one and lay out their case for why it was okay for them to fight. No, we just lay down the law. Judge, jury, and executioner. "You in

The Who is You

the back, don't touch him. You in the middle, don't speak to him. You on the other side, just look out the window and mind your business.”

Now, why do we do that? Because, as the parent, we know that the presented issue is not the real issue. We know that the real problem is that we have three immature kids in the back who all want something, and none of them are getting what they want. So, let me propose something to us this morning that maybe, just maybe, when it comes to the fights, the strife, the quarrels, and the divisions in our lives, that maybe, just maybe, our Heavenly Father knows what He's talking about when He inspired James to write 4:1. At the root of every argument is not something that's happening out there, but rather, there is something in here, where I am not getting what I want.

Now, James is going to continue on here, and he's going to press his case a little further. What he says is going to seem like hyperbole, but I'm telling you, he's making a point. Look at verse number 2. He says, “You desire and do not have, so you murder.” We're like, “Whoa, James, that's a bit over the top, don't you think?” Well, it is, and it isn't, because the point he's trying to make is this: if we don't recognize that the root cause is actually in here versus something out there, then we carry within us the potential to do things that not only bring destruction to our own lives but bring destruction to those around us.

I love what the great commentator Dr. Constable had to say in his commentary of this verse. He said this: “The ultimate end of our desires, or the ultimate end of trying to get what we want, is murder.” He said we can see this through human history, all the way from Cain to Ahab to David, and now even to the present that's reflected in our world wars. In the text, James is not accusing his readers of murder but is reminding them of the serious and ultimate consequences of living merely to satisfy personal desires. James says, “You desire and don't have, so you murder.” It's important to keep in mind that when it comes to this topic of murder, Jesus actually changed the standard. From His vantage point, no longer is it just about the physical act of murder. Jesus said this in Matthew 5:21–22a ESV. He said,

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you (He's about to change the standard) that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.”

Now, the apostle John, who heard Jesus say this, would echo it and say it like this in 1 John 3:15 ESV. John would say,

¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Here's the point. This is a really big deal, and it's something that we need to each give attention to. Our unchecked desires carry within them the potential to do all kinds of damage, not just to us but to those around us. James goes on in verse 2. He says this, “You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” You covet. We look at everybody else. We look at what everybody else has and what they get, and we feel like no matter what we have, no matter how good it might be, it's not good enough.

We have this insatiable desire to have more. I need to get the latest. I need to get the greatest. I never have enough. I'm never content. Why is that? The root issue here is when I don't get what I want, there's something inside of me that gets set off and ultimately leads to this place of

The Who is You

strife and or fighting. I'm telling you, the "who" is you. The "who" is me. The root issue is in here, not out there. Please understand. I'm not saying that there are no circumstances or events that shouldn't upset us. Of course, there are. Being treated unfairly should upset us. Not having somebody keep their word when they promised, should upset us. Not getting what we rightly paid for and or earned should upset us.

What James is saying actually connects us back to chapter 3 and what we learned about godly wisdom. What he's saying is that a truly wise person, when conflict arises, is able to take a step back. They take a deep breath in and go, "Okay, at least for part of the problem, I'm at fault because I'm not getting what I desire." When it comes to pursuing what we desire, the next thing James is going to warn us about is our motive for those desires. In other words, why do we want what we want? Let's go to the text. We have to move quickly here. James 4:2-3 ESV,

² You 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. ³ You ask and do not receive (why), because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

This is a big-time motive check here. The word passions that we see at the end of verse 3 in the original language in Greek is the word hedon. It's where we get our English term hedonism, which is the philosophy that views pleasure as the chief goal and aim in life. Hedonism literally means I'm following after my passions, and I'm going to indulge myself in what I want to indulge. It's a me first lifestyle, where I'm going to do whatever I want. I'm going to do whatever makes me happy. I'm going to do whatever feels good to me, regardless of how it affects anybody else. It's a self-centered type of life.

You see, at its core, hedonism is a submission to self. I'm going to pursue what I want, no matter the cost, whether that cost is financial or, relational, or even spiritual. James says that whether we want to acknowledge it or not, these passions are constantly at war. That's the language he uses, at war within us. If they're at war, then there is a question that arises. My mom used to always say this to me when I was a kid. "Harrison, it takes two to fight. It takes two to tango." So, if on one side of the battlefield, we have these passions, wants, and desires, then who are they at war with?

James makes it really clear for us. He says these wants and desires are at war with God and His model for our lives. In other words, the battle that rages inside of us is actually a battle over submission. Am I going to submit to self, to my wants, my desires, and my passions? Or am I going to submit to God, to His Word, and to His way of life? James says that if you are frustrated because you're not getting what you want, it's probably because you've been submitting to the wrong thing. Most of us, if we're honest this morning, which by the way, being honest in church is always a good policy, if we're honest, most of us have been guilty of this a time or two.

We want what God has for us. We just don't want it His way. We want His blessings. We just don't want Him. We want to be in control, and we don't want His rules. We want to call the shots. Hear me, there is no salvation without submission. If you were to boil down Christianity to one word, the word that might float to the top is submission. I'm submitting control of my life into God's hands. He is sitting on the throne of my life, not me. Unfortunately, in America today, there are lots of pastors who preach something different. They preach, "Come to Jesus and then keep living how you want to live. Come to Jesus, but do your own thing." That's not the gospel. That's not how salvation works. Pastors have been preaching like God requires nothing from you.

The Who is You

Hear me. God requires everything from you. The call of Jesus says come and die. Die to your way of independent living and take up My way of living. The gospel says come as you are, but don't stay as you are. The gospel says to come and be born again. Put Jesus on the throne. His Word becomes the standard. His Word becomes the final authority in our life. It may seem like He requires us to do things that cut us cross-grain to what we ultimately think we desire. But we have to come to the conclusion that He knows me better than I know me, that this submission is actually a beautiful submission. At the end of the day, He's smarter than I am, and whether I can see it or not, His plan, His structure for my life, is actually the thing that brings true fulfillment, a true fulfillment that lasts.

It's not just here, self-gratified in a moment, and then the next day, I'm depressed. No, it's a gratification that lasts and goes on and on, not just in this life, but in the life to come. To be honest, I think most of us get this. We know this. But how quick are we to say the truth with our mouths that we desire God, but our actions tell a different story? We end up pursuing our worldly desires instead, and when we do that, here's what James has to say. James 4:4 ESV,

⁴ You adulterous people!

Jeez, James, that's a bit strong, don't you think? James is letting us know that sin in our lives is not an area we can afford to play games with. He goes on, and says this,

⁴ 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.

Those are pretty stark terms. They're binary. They're black and white. There aren't any blurred lines here at all. It's either friendship with God or friendship with the world. It can't be both. Hear me, this is not God saying, "Hey, there is some good stuff out there in the world, and I'm just trying to keep you from enjoying it." No, this is God saying, "Hey, there might be some stuff out there in the world that looks good to you, that might feel good to you, but I'm calling you away from it because I see the end from the beginning. I know those things you think are so great are actually, in the end, going cause you to perish."

Now, as we consider this, I think it's important we clearly define what James is referring to when he uses that phrase "the world." As a matter of fact, the phrase "the world" is seen multiple times throughout the New Testament. It has three different uses throughout the New Testament. First and foremost, when authors in the New Testament use this phrase, "the world," it's referring to the cosmos or the created world. Secondly, we see it used in reference to the humans that inhabit this created world. So, when James says, "Don't be friends of the world," we know he's not referring to either of these two things because that would come in contradiction to other Scriptures.

The first law of hermeneutics or the interpretation of Scripture is that Scripture reveals Scripture. We know in John 1, John 3, John 7, and John 8 that God loves the world, the cosmos, created world. He loves the people of the world. So, it can't be either of those first two definitions. If it's not those first two, then it has to be the third. The third definition the New Testament writers use for the world refers to the spiritual realm that is in opposition to God and in rebellion against His Kingdom. So, what James is saying is, "Hey, don't look for and pursue friendship, or look to find common ground with the system called "the world," which is anti-God, anti-kingdom, and promotes the pursuits of the flesh and of the mind. Jesus said it like this: You're to be in the world, but not of the world.

The Who is You

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Hey, for the time being, you're in the world physically and geographically. You are standing here on this sphere of a planet called Earth, but you're not of the world. Your origin is different.” If we've put our faith in Christ, if He is our Savior, the Scripture tells us that our nature has literally been changed. We become new creations in Christ Jesus. The old is gone. Everything becomes new. Our origin is different. As a matter of fact, look what James says in verse five. He says this,

⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He (speaking of God) yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

He's referring to the fact that now, you and I belong to God. God has redeemed us from the power, and the systems of this world. He's given us this new origin. He's given us this new identity. Our citizenship is no longer with a particular country. Our citizenship is with heaven. The Bible says He took our hardened hearts of stone out, and He gave us new hearts, hearts of flesh. He sealed us, and then filled us with His Holy Spirit. It's because of that we are no longer our own. The Bible says He yearns jealously over His people.

Think about it in terms of a marriage two become one. I now belong to my wife. My wife belongs to me. If I were to step outside of our marriage, if I were to pursue someone or something else, what does that make me? An adulterer. I feel like I've heard that term somewhere before. James says it in verse four. “You adulterous people!” Why does he say that? He's saying it because that's the picture he's trying to convey. When we got saved, we became the bride of Christ. Literally, that's the picture the New Testament gives us. We became the bride of Christ. When we consort with or when we pursue the things of the world, it puts us spiritually in that same category called adultery.

Except in this case, we're cheating on Jesus. By the way, He's jealous for His bride. When we run after the things of the world, it's as if we're saying to Jesus, “Hey, You're not enough for me. So, I'm going to pursue what this world has to offer, whether it's more money, more fame, more comfort, or more reputation.” Whatever that line is for you, you can insert it there. We know it's wrong, and ultimately, we know it hurts the heart of God. And because of that, I think sometimes when we finally come to our senses, we're really slow to repent. We're really slow to turn toward God. In our hearts, it's almost as if we become like the prodigal son we see in Luke 15.

He had shame over his actions. And not knowing how his father was going to respond, it took him far too long to go home. I can't speak for you, but I can speak for me. I've been there. I know that feeling very well. That's why I love James 4:6. “But He, speaking of God, gives more grace.” Is anybody else grateful for the grace of God in their life? I've heard it said like this, “Mercy is us not getting what we deserve, but grace is actually God giving us the good things that we don't deserve, which is forgiveness, healing, wholeness, and right standing.” I love how Pastor Jack Hayford described the grace of God. Pastor Jack, one of my heroes, this is what he said. He said that “Grace is God's unmerited favor that's given to us at our point of need in Jesus.” His unmerited favor given to us at our point of need in Jesus. James 4:6 ESV says it like this,

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

So, according to James, the key to receiving God's grace is to take this posture called humility. Which means that when I approach God, I realize I have nothing to offer Him, but I've got

The Who is You

everything to receive from Him. It's me saying, "God, I can't fix this on my own. God, I have no excuses for my wandering." That old song, "Prone to Wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." Humility says, "I have no excuse for it. God, I was wrong. Forgive me, cleanse me, search me, know me, try me, and make me more like Your Son, Jesus." James says that if we will approach the Father like that in humility, God will bestow grace upon us.

Then, on the other hand, he says this: if you're proud, or if you think you have it all together, if you think you know what's best, or if you continue to go your own way, God actually opposes that person. God opposes the proud. Think about it like this. There's this amazing promise in Scripture that if God be for you, nobody can be against you. If that's true, then that means the opposite is true. If God opposes you, nobody can be for you. God opposes the proud. Look at verses 7–10 ESV. James gives a key here. He says this,

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. 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. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you (or lift you up).

A couple of things I want to draw your attention to. First, James says this, "Submit yourselves to God." I know I talked about that just a moment ago, but the key to submission is total obedience. In other words, we have to be totally sold out to Him, His Word, and His way. We can't just believe in Him. We have to actually obey Him. James says this, "Resist the devil, and he'll flee from you." The word resist, in the original language, literally means to press back against. Can I just be honest? Sometimes, I think we give the devil too much credit. We fear him, and we treat him like he has so much authority and power in our lives and that he can make us do whatever he wants us to do. I'm telling you, church, it's a lie. He's a defeated foe, and the only power that he has over us is what we allow him to have. So, James says, "Resist him. Push back against him, and he'll flee from you." Okay, so here's the question. How do you push back? How do you resist? You push back with the truth of God's Word.

Remember, the devil's a liar. He's the father of all lies. So, when he comes, he comes whispering lies. He says things in our ears and in our hearts. He says stuff like, "Hey, you'll never be able to defeat this temptation. Look at your situation. You're stuck. Hey, God saw what you did, and He's mad at you. Hey, look around at the world. Look at all this stuff I have to offer you." So, when he comes with these temptations and these lies, how do we push back? We resist with the Word of God. We say, "No, no, no! I'm actually more than a conqueror through Him that loves me. Hey, no, no, no! Yes, I messed up, but I'm the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. I'm accepted in the beloved, and you have no power over me because greater is He that's in me than he that is in the world."

James says, "Resist, push back, and he'll flee from you." Then James says perhaps the most radical thing we see in this entire chapter. He says, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." This is the promise: as we approach God, He's not going to keep us at arm's length. Again, I call to mind the story of the prodigal son. He's slowly, gingerly making his way home. He's rehearsing his apology speech in his head. But what do we see the father doing? He's looking. He's looking. He's been looking. This tells me that the eyes of forgiveness are much quicker than the feet of repentance.

The father is looking. When he sees the son, he goes running. He closes that gap, and the Bible says he falls on his son, embraces him, and begins to kiss his neck. He restores him back into

The Who is You

right relationship. This is the picture of the Father. He doesn't stay distant. He's near. He's present. As we draw near to the Father, He enters right into the pain of our life. He enters right into the tragedy and the dysfunction of our life. He enters right into those moments of joy and celebration in our life. He comes alongside us. He comforts us. He reassures us. He goes, "Hey, I want to fight this battle for you."

Draw near to God, and He'll draw near to you. Okay, cool. How do I draw near? If you're in sin, you draw near through humble repentance. First John 1:9 says if I confess my sin, He's faithful and just to forgive me and to cleanse me from all unrighteousness. So, we confess our sin in humble repentance, and we thank Him for Jesus. We thank Him for the blood that was shed on our behalf. We also can draw near through time spent reading His Word. If you read the Word, you'll find truth. The Bible says you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free. If you spend time in His Word, you're going to get in the presence of Jesus. Why? Because He is the Word. He's the Word made flesh.

You can draw near through time in prayer. That's this honest dialogue that you have with God. It's not a monologue where we come with our list and our demands; it's a dialogue where we speak, but then we listen. Listen, our speaking, and our praying doesn't have to be eloquent. It just needs to be sincere. We draw near through praise and worship. We have the promise in the book of Psalms that He inhabits, literally with His presence, takes up dwelling in the place of our praise. We have the promise that He meets with him who rejoices. We draw near through being in His house and being surrounded by His people. Jesus said that where two or more gathered in My name, there I am right there in their midst. Here's the key to all of these: Unhurried time in His presence. I'm drawing near to God, He's drawing near to me, and I'm not in a hurry to leave. Listen, the human heart can be filled with all different kinds of idols. Do you know what unhurried time in God's presence does? It replaces those idols with the one true desire of our heart, which is Jesus. It's there in that place of His presence that we discover He truly is the desire of all nations. There is no substitute for being with Jesus.

I'm nearly 40 years old. I've learned a lot. I have a whole lot more to learn. This I know for sure. This I know with perfect clarity, everything that I want, need, or desire in this life is found, fulfilled, and fortified in the place of His presence. Church, we must be people of His presence. We have this promise: draw near to God, and He will draw near to us. I have three minutes left with so much to say and not enough time to say it in. Let me hustle and try to get us to the end of this chapter. As we get into verses 11 and 12, James is going to turn his attention to the power of our words. He's going to make sure that we understand there's actually a connection between humility in our hearts and the words that come out of our mouths. In James 4:11 ESV, he says,

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.

Here's the problem, there is only one lawgiver and judge. He who is able to save and to destroy. So, who are you to judge your neighbor? James is actually connecting us back to an earlier portion of the letter. He's taking us back to chapter three. He's reminding us, afresh, about the power of the tongue. We talked about this two weeks ago. Do you remember when Pastor Bayless talked about the power of the tongue?

What James is saying is, "Hey, He's going to remember what I told you. Be careful about what you say. Be careful about what you say of others because those words have the power to build

The Who is You

up, but they also have the power to destroy.” Then, he adds this other layer to the power of words. He connects it to what's really in our hearts. It's almost as if he's echoing Jesus when Jesus said this, “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” What James is saying is, “Hey, look, you need to be more concerned with judging what's going on inside your own heart rather than in your pride, using your words to judge other people.” He says you have to do this because there's only one true judge, and that's God Almighty. In the manner that you judge others, He is going to judge you. He has the power to save or the power to destroy. Then James makes one final note here in this chapter on the topic of humility. This is where we sort of wrap it up. In James 4:13–17 ESV, he says,

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

So, James wraps up here with a final word on the danger of planning our lives without the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty over our lives. You see, so often, in our pride, we don't think about eternity. We don't think about the life to come. I don't know about you, but I have this tendency to get so consumed with the present and making a life for myself right now, in the here and now, that I forget to lift my eyes. I forget that I actually don't hold the power of my life in my hand. We can get so focused on what's on the agenda for tomorrow, accumulating wealth, accumulating possessions, and stuff, that we actually fail to realize that tomorrow is not promised to anyone.

James says that our lives here on earth are like a mist. They're like a vapor. If you were to take a bottle of perfume or cologne and spray it, you see it just for a second. It's a wisp, and then it vanishes. He says that's what our life is like. It appears for a moment, and then it's gone. He's telling us, “Hey, those among you who are wise, you need to consider this. Consider eternity. Then in humility, turn from the arrogance of self-determination, and acknowledge God is actually the one who is in control of our lives.” It reminds me very much of the parable that Jesus told in Luke 12. I want to wrap up by just reading this. If you have your Bible, turn to Luke 12:15–21 ESV. It says this,

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (I love this.)
¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,
¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’
¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! (if there is one person you don't want to be called a fool by) This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ (Jesus ends by saying,) ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

I almost wonder if while James was penning the end of chapter 4, he had this parable in mind. He has these words in mind. Tomorrow is not promised, and life is like a vapor. It's here, and then it's gone. I don't know if you've ever driven by old churches. I have a few by my house. Some of them are almost 200 years old. Old churches have this really interesting characteristic

The Who is You

about them. We don't see it very often anymore, but a lot of old churches have a graveyard or a cemetery attached to it. It's a little morbid. It's a little eerie, perhaps a bit uncouth for modern sensibilities. That's why we don't do it anymore.

I was thinking it would be really interesting to park your car and start walking to the church. As you're walking to the church, you have to pass all the tombstones. You have to walk through the grave. Every time you enter the house of God, you're reminded of your mortality. You're reminded that tomorrow is not promised. You're reminded that there's more at stake than what's just going on today. Imagine every time you walk into church, you're reminded that life is like a vapor, a mist that's here, and then it's gone. I want to end where we started. In worship, we sang about eternity.

I want to end by posing a question. Do you think about eternity? Does it consume your mind? Because this life is fleeting. Sometimes, we trick ourselves and think we have all the time in the world. No, we don't. Do you think about the life that is to come? That soon and very soon, you and I are going to see King Jesus. This earth is passing away with all of its possessions and with all of its passions. They are going to be burned up and gone. They are not going to last. As a matter of fact, the only things that are going to last on the pages of eternity are the things you did for God and for His Kingdom. Do you think about eternity? How often do you consider that? Soon, and very soon, we'll see the King. We're almost home.

So, with that in mind, may I ask you a question? Are you ready to meet Him? Are you ready to see Him? Are you ready for Him to judge the living and the dead? When you stand before Him, are you going to be able to say, "Jesus, You've been on the throne of my life."? Or are you anxious about that day? Because if you're honest and take an introspective look, you'd go, "Actually, I'm the one sitting on the throne of my life." This morning, if you're here under the sound of my voice and you are in any way, shape, or form anxious about the state of your soul, I have good news for you. I have an answer. I know where you can find peace. His name is Jesus. His peace only becomes available to you when He's sitting on the throne of your life.

Don't fool yourself into thinking that because you came to a church service years ago and lifted your hand and repeated some words you're saved. If you said those words but then went off and lived the same way that you've always been living and nothing changed, if heart and words, actions and words aren't in alignment, then the words mean nothing. So, let me ask you. Are you really saved? Is Jesus really in charge? Are you submitted to Him? Are His words your final authority, or do you just pick and choose the parts that you like that sound good and won't cost you anything? The reason I ask this is because eternity is real. Heaven and hell are real. You're going to end up in one of those places for all of eternity. Eternity is forever, and I don't want anybody to go to hell.

I heard a preacher say it like this: there are only two people in hell. Jesus called it a place of wailing and gnashing of teeth. So, there are only two people in hell, the ones who get there and they go, "Oh man, I screwed this thing up." There is such regret and wailing. "Oh Lord, give me another chance." But I'm telling you, there is a day coming when God's grace is going to find that limit. You're not going to be able to access it anymore. There are going to be people who wake up in hell and they're going to say, "Lord, I'm sorry." But it's going to be too late.

There is another group who is going to be in hell. They're going to wake up there and be the gnashing of teeth. It's indignant. It's indignant. "How dare You, God?" There is anger, "How dare You put me here?" Listen, in our pride, let's not end up like that. But in humility, "Lord, I can't save myself. I'm turning to You, and I put my trust in You. Lord, will You rescue me? Will You

The Who is You

save me? Will You sit on the throne of my life? Will You teach me and give me the strength to follow You?" If you do that, if you'll draw near to God, He'll draw near to you. He will not turn you away. Come on, let's pray this morning.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that Your Holy Spirit is able to take the Word, divide it several thousand different ways, and make it real and relevant to each of our hearts, including mine. Father, right now, I pray for those whose hearts have been pricked by Your Word. Those who have looked deep inside themselves and said, "Jesus is not on the throne of my life." Holy Spirit, I pray right now that You would give them the courage to turn to You. As they put Jesus there, as they declare their dependence and submission to Him, I thank You for applying salvation to their life. Thank You for changing them radically from the inside out and that You are making them born again.

God, I pray that You would fill them with Your Holy Spirit. Help us to live lives that bring honor to You, Lord. Father, as we get ready to go today, I pray that they would know Your love, that they would experience the grace of Jesus, and that they would know the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. God, upon Your people, I pray that You would bless them, keep them, and cause Your face to shine on them. Be gracious to them and lift Your countenance upon them. Seal them with Your peace. Oh, Jesus, we love You. Jesus, we love You. Jesus, we love You.

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