

James 4:1-6

June 21, 2020

War.

Never did such a little word hold such horrors.

ML Steadman wrote *The Light between the Oceans*. The book is a work of fiction, but the experience of Tom Sherbourne could come out of the mouths of so many who went to war and left a piece of themselves there.

“Tom Sherbourne has plenty of time to think about the war. About the faces, the voices of the blokes who had stood beside him, who saved his life one way or another; the ones whose dying words he heard, and those whose muttered jumbles he couldn’t make out, but who he nodded to anyway. Tom isn’t one of the men whose legs trailed by a hank of sinews, or whose guts cascaded from their casing like slithering eels. Nor were his lungs turned to glue or his brains to stodge by the gas. But he’s scarred all the same, having to live in the same skin as the man who did the things that needed to be done back then. He carries that other shadow, which is cast inward. He tries not to dwell on it: he’s seen plenty of men turned worse than useless that way. So he gets on with life around the edges of this thing he’s got no name for.” — M.L. Stedman

“No tongue can tell, no mind conceive, no pen
portray the horrible sights I witnessed.”

Recollections of a soldier wounded at Antietam, 1862

War. Never did such a little word hold such horrors.

Today, James is going to talk to us about war.

War without the sounds of gunfire.

War without the bomb of canon.

War without the tanks.

But war just the same.

James is going to talk to us about war in church. He is going to show us how a church can become a battleground and how to avoid it.

In one of the most striking warnings and calls to repentance in the entire NT—James is going to

- Tell us where war comes from.
- Why war makes sense.
- The remedy for war.

Pitched battles in the church of God are an affront to God.

PROP: Strive for peace.

[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.” James 4:1–6

1. *Where war comes from (James 4:1-3)*

[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Quarrels is too weak a word here. Quarrels brings to mind petty squabbles. But the word might better be rendered war.

What causes wars and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

Remember our context—James is speaking to churches. He is speaking to our church too. Disagreements that lead to an all-out conflict James calls—“War.” It is that serious.

The very last place we should expect to find acrimony, strife, and conflict is within the church of the living God. But yet, war can be declared between two people, two groups and turn a church into a warzone.

There are times the bride of Christ tears herself apart.

How does a church become a battlefield?

[2] You desire and do not have, so you murder.

Did you see? What causes war in a church?

Very basic. “You desire and do not have, so you murder.”

Someone has something you want so you murder them—not with your hands—but with your heart. What could that other person have? Maybe someone has something you want. Maybe they have the respect, or position, or health, or family, or the perfect life. So you murder.

After all, hatred in the heart for another person is the same as murder.

Then there is an escalation—

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.

Do you see where war comes from?

It comes from those passions inside us for our own gain and glory burst out on others and we ‘fight and war.’

Where does war come from?

Misplaced desires. It is so very subtle. You might say—not me, I could never go to war with someone else in our church. These things don't start with an out and out declaration of war—but a small desire for something someone else has.

Like this: Instead of wanting to serve—you want to BE served.
Instead of wanting bless—you want to BE blessed.
Instead of wanting to give—you want to BE given to.
Instead of helping—you want to get promoted.
Instead of overlooking sin—you get embittered.
Instead of forgiving—you want to get even.

These desires start small and they would seem innocuous, but Misplaced and twisted leads to WAR.

War comes from within. The most serious and virulent attacks on our church and any church is ALWAYS within and never from without. War comes when we don't get what we want.

We know where war comes from—now why war makes sense.

There is a part of each of us—even as believers in Jesus—to fight and not back down.

2. Why war makes sense (James 4:4-5)

James changes metaphors from war to sexual immorality. He compares the bride of Christ to a prostitute. Follow his logic.

[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.

What is he talking about when he says, Friendship with the world? When James is speaking of the world he is NOT saying anything about the ecology of our planet, nor having friends that are unbelievers.

He speaking about the philosophy of this world.

In other words, friendship with the world is adopting the norms and standards of our society instead of the norms and standards of godliness. The reason war makes sense is because live in a society constantly at war with each other.

Look around.

In our world to get ahead—you don't serve others—you conquer others.

In our world if you feel threatened—you don't listen—you accuse.

In our world if you get attacked—you don't try to understand—you hit right back.

Kindness = weakness

Gentleness = deficiency

In our world, you don't cover over someone's sin—you expose them.

In our world, you don't help people with their frailties—you mock them.

In our world, you serve the weak in secret—you virtue signal to everyone.

Do you see the reason that war makes sense?

Because we live in a warzone. I have an uncle who fought in Vietnam. The rest of his life he was unable to sleep soundly. Even the slightest noise would make him jump. Because of his experience in war. War had marked him.

You are in a warzone whether you know it or not.

War makes sense to us because we live in a warzone. We don't pass bombed out buildings on the way to Trader Joe's but we are at war. We don't have to watch out for snipers on our way to work—but we are at war.

How easy it is to bring that mentality to church.

Let James speak to us again—

4b,

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"?

In other words, if you declare war on someone else in the church—you are at war with God.

I don't want to oppose God.

How do we show ourselves to be friends of God? One of the primary ways is in how we act toward others in this church. How you treat others here—shows what you think of God. How do we preserve ourselves and our church?

Apply: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

When someone wrongs you—you LOVE them in return.

When someone rejoices—you don't wonder why not me—you REJOICE.

When strife is about to spark—you listen and work toward PEACE.

When someone mistreats you—you PATIENTLY overlook.

When someone rude to you—you are GOOD to them in return.

When feel unappreciated in your service—you FAITHFULLY continue to serve Jesus.

When someone is harsh—you are GENTLE in return.

When someone is reckless toward you—you are SELF-CONTROLLED.

War makes sense because there is still a part of us that is twisted and crooked. Our desires—even as Christians can still be twisted. We need help. Still.

If there was ever a season for unity it is right now. It is this year. Let me tell you, this next presidential election is going to be the most contentious since Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in 1860. We are not going to have the same opinion about what should happen. But we are united around Jesus and NOT a political ideology.

We must remain united in Christ; expecting that we will not be uniform in our opinions.

True:

COVID—Masks

Protests happening

Political Ideology

Let me tell you—NOTHING is more important in our church than remaining fixed on Jesus individually and as a church.

And avoid all temptation to go to war.

War—comes from within.

War makes sense because we live in a warzone.

3. The remedy for war (James 4:6)

Vs. 6,

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

But he gives more grace. That is what I need. He—God—gives favor. I need his favor. I need his help.

How does his grace come to us?

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

Humility.

What does that look like?

- Before we question others—we question ourselves.
- We are more suspicious of our motives than others.
- We NEVER assume we understand all that is going on.
- We REFUSE to exalt our opinions on secondary matters.
- We assert other’s rights and not our own.
- We are more concerned with our own sin than others.
- We understand the greatest threat to ourselves is from within.

The only way to avoid war is by being humble.

I am aware that I have EVERY reason to be humble. Too often, I am too confident in my assessments and opinions. And I don’t think I am the only one.

The key to this kind of humble self-awareness is grace from God. The grace that he gives to the humble. Make no mistake God actively opposes the proud in every element of their lives.

Humility is KING in God's economy. His eyes are almost always on the humble. His hand is almost always ready to bless the humble.

Almost always—

We know where war comes from—we know what it makes sense. Let's talk about somethings that DOESN'T make ANY sense.

Let's talk about Jesus.

The most humble man to walk this earth—there was a time where God's eyes were not on him. There was a man who deserved blessing from God but was cursed by God.

Who was that man? Jesus.

He had NO reason to be humble, but he was.
He EVERY reason to be blessed, but he wasn't.

Because of his death—we can be humble before God. Lord knows we have enough to be humble about. Humility is not safe when someone wants to take advantage of you—God does not.

Jesus has already been punished.

From God—humility does not earn: I told you so. But, I love you so. That is such good news.

Humility is ONLY safe because Jesus died. Now we can be humble before a loving God. James is not talking about humility in general—but humility in our relationships here.

I invite you to think—

Is there someone you need to humble yourself toward? First—do business with God and is there someone you need to go to?

Being unified on Jesus gives us freedom to disagree.

Being unified on Jesus demands that we stay united.

We should not expect to be uniform in all our opinions but we should remain united in Christ.

Where we are united on Christ—we can be free to disagree on secondary matters. Disagreements NEED NOT indeed MUST NOT lead to war.

Tell you something hard to hear—

EVERYTHING politics is secondary.

EVERYTHING about the future of our country is secondary.

I'm not saying it is NOT important, but it is not as important as remaining united to Christ together. NOTHING is.

Remember what the witness to Antietam said,

“No tongue can tell, no mind conceive, no pen portray the horrible sights I witnessed.”

But in the church—I'm praying that in our church—we continue to be countercultural. I am praying that in the years to come—we look back at 2020 and say, in the midst of the societal strife,

“No tongue can tell, no mind conceive, no pen portray the magnificent peace we witnessed.”

PRAY