

SEPTEMBER 20, 2009

**WINNING THE WAR WITHIN
JAMES 3:17-4:8A; MARK 9:30-37**

HOW ARE YOU TREATING YOUR INSIDES THESE DAYS? I HOPE YOU AREN'T STILL FILLING YOUR LUNGS WITH TOBACCO SMOKE? ARE YOU STILL EATING CRAZY FOODS USUALLY REFERRED TO AS "A HEART ATTACK READY TO HAPPEN"? HAS YOUR FAMILY GIVEN YOU ONE OF THOSE LITTLE PILLOWS THAT SAY "NUMBER ONE COUCH POTATO"? WE SAY "YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT OR DRINK OR SMOKE", BUT WHAT IS IT WITHIN US THAT CREATES THE CONFLICT BETWEEN KNOWING WHAT IS GOOD TO DO AND NOT DOING IT? IF YOU LISTEN TO JAMES, THE BROTHER OF OUR LORD, "WE ARE WHAT WE DESIRE". SOMETIMES WE DESIRE THE PROPER, HEALTHY THINGS, SOMETIMES WE CRAVE THE WRONG THING. JESUS SAID, THE PROBLEM DOES NOT START WITH WHAT WE PUT INTO OURSELVES, BUT THE HUMAN HEART PUSHING US TO EITHER HOLY LIVING OR SIN.

LAST WEEK, WE SAID WORDS CAN HURT AND HARM, UNLESS WE ALLOW THE CHRIST WAY OF LOVE TO GUIDE THEM. TODAY, JAMES TELLS US, THAT BEHIND THE WORDS ARE OUR INNER DESIRES. WHAT WE SAY IS FORMED OUT OF WHAT WE FEEL OR DON'T FEEL. WHAT WE DO CAN ARISE FROM OUR THOUGHTLESS IMPULSES OR OUT OF OUR THOUGHT-FILLED-REASON. EITHER WAY, OUR INNER GIFTS CAN BECOME TAINTED IF THINGS LIKE ENVY, THE DESIRE TO HAVE WHAT ANOTHER PERSON HAS, BECOMES OUR DESIRE. MAYBE, IT IS THE ANGER BECAUSE OF WHAT WE DO NOT HAVE. PERHAPS, IT'S THE UNCONTROLLABLE URGE TO HAVE MORE THAN EVERYONE ELSE. WHATEVER IT IS, JAMES SPEAKS AS MUCH TO OUR CULTURE AS TO HIS.

WE HAVE A PROBLEM, HOUSTON. THERE IS A WAR WITHIN US. THE WAR PITS THE UNGODLY WAYS OF THE WORLD WITH THE GODLY BEHAVIORS PRESCRIBED BY THE BIBLE. SOME DAYS IT APPEARS THE BATTLE IS DONE AND THE UNGODLY WAYS ARE WINNING. SPEAKING TO HIS CHURCH, JAMES SAYS, "THOSE CONFLICTS AND DISPUTES AMONG YOU, WHERE DO THEY COME FROM? DO THEY NOT COME FROM YOUR CRAVINGS THAT ARE AT WAR WITHIN YOU?"

LIKE OUR WORDS NEED TO BE MEASURED AND CLEANSED BY CHRIST'S LOVE, SO WE ALSO HAVE TO GO DEEPLY BEHIND THE WORDS. OUR

INNER DESIRES, OFTEN KNOWN ONLY TO US, NEED TO BE CLEANSED AND EXAMINED BY OUR FAITH. IN SOME WAYS JAMES IS LIKE THE BUDDHISTS, THE NUMBER ONE CAUSE OF SUFFERING AND ILL IN THIS WORLD IS ENVY AND DESIRE. DESIRE FOR THE WORLD TO MEET MY EXPECTATIONS. ENVY FOR THE PERSON WHO HAS WHAT I THINK I SHOULD HAVE. THE DESIRE FOR OTHERS TO BE THE WAY I THINK THEY SHOULD BE AND HOSTILITY WHEN THEY ARE NOT.

FOR JAMES ENVIOUS DESIRE GIVES BIRTH TO SIN. SIN DEVELOPS INTO VIOLENCE, HURT, STEALING, CHEATING, MURDER---ALL THE SORDID THINGS WE READ ABOUT DAILY. DOES IT PAIN YOU TO THINK THAT EACH ONE OF US IS CAPABLE OF ALL THESE BAD THINGS?

I WONDER SOMETIMES, HAVE WE FINALLY CROSSED A LINE IN OUR TIME? HAVE WE CONFUSED BEING WITH HAVING? I AM NOT WORTHY ENOUGH BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH. I'LL NEVER BE HAPPY AS LONG AS PEOPLE HAVE MORE THAN I DO. LIFE IS SO UNFAIR, WHY DOES THAT GUY HAVE SO MUCH AND I WORK SO HARD, FOR SO LITTLE. OUR CULTURE IS FILLED WITH THOSE WHO TAKE THIS TO EXTREMES AND STOP AT NOTHING TO GET WHAT THEY WANT. AND IN THE WORST SENSE, DO WE LOOK AROUND US AND BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE WHO HAVE LESS ARE SOMEHOW LESSER PERSONS? IS THAT WHY WE HAVE SO MANY EXCUSES NOT TO HELP THE TRULY POOR AND BLAIM THEM FOR NOT LIFTING THEMSELVES UP? IS THAT WHY SO MANY OF US LIVE ON THE "EDGE OF SORROW" BECAUSE WE NEVER THINK WE HAVE ENOUGH? DO WE HAVE DESIRES THAT WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED? DO THEY NEED TO BE FOR US TO BE JOYFUL?

JAMES' BROTHER, JESUS THE MESSIAH, TAUGHT THAT BEING A GOOD AND WHOLE PERSON WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HAVING. THE DISCIPLES ARE FIGHTING OVER WHICH ONE OF THEM IS GREATER, WHO CAN HAVE THE BEST SPOT NEXT TO JESUS. EVEN THOSE CLOSEST TO JESUS ON EARTH CANNOT CONTROL THEIR ENVY. JESUS NOTICES THIS RIGHT AWAY THAT DISORDER IS ABOUT TO FOLLOW ENVY, AS ALWAYS. TO BRING PEACE AND GENTLENESS INTO OUR DESIRES, WE HAVE TO STOP THE UNHEALTHY PINING AND YEARN FOR THE RIGHT THINGS. WE HAVE TO APPLY FAITH IN GOD TO THE BATTLE WITHIN. "WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE LAST OF ALL AND SERVANT OF ALL." UNRULY DESIRES CAN ONLY BE REMOVED BY THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE, THE WORD AND WAY OF GOD. WE CAN ONLY WIN THE WAR WITHIN WITH GOD WHO CAME AS CHRIST. JAMES

GETS TOUGH, “WHOEVER WISHES TO BE A FRIEND TO THE UNGODLY WAYS OF THE WORLD IS NO LONGER A FRIEND OF GOD’S.”

FIRST, TO WIN THE WAR WITHIN, WE NEED THE RIGHT ALLIES. JAMES SAYS THIS BEGINS WITH A FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST. “WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS!” GOD GIVES GRACE TO THOSE WHO DEEPLY GRASP WHAT IT MEANS WHEN THE LORD, THE SON OF GOD, SAID, “YOU ARE MY FRIENDS”. WE ALSO NEED SUPPORTIVE, POSITIVE PEOPLE AROUND US WHO HELP US STAY FOCUSED ON BEING CHRISTIAN, INSTEAD OF POSSESSING EVERYTHING. OUR ALLY IS THE POWER KNOWN AS THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT IMPLANTS THE WISDOM ATTITUDES OF CHRIST WITHIN US. GOD HAS NOT LEFT US ALONE WITH THE BATTLE WITH OURSELVES. HE GAVE US THE SCRIPTURE AND ALL THE WISDOM IN OUR TRADITIONS IN ORDER TO DESIRE THE RIGHT THINGS.

SECOND, TO WIN THE WAR WITHIN, WE NEED THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT. PAUL SAYS THE CHURCH’S JOB IS TO EQUIP THE SAINTS TO SERVE GOD AND HIS CREATION. THIS REFERS US BACK TO PAUL AND THE ARMOR OF GOD. GOD GIVES US DIRECTION. LET’S GET OUR LIVES RIGHT. WHAT INNER DESIRES ARE LEADING US TO PAIN AND SUFFERING, UNHEALTHY COMPETITION WITH EACH OTHER, AND ANIMOSITY? PUT ON GENTLENESS. DO ANY OF US KNOW WHAT AN INNER CALM, UNSTRESSED MOMENT FEELS LIKE ANY MORE? SILENCE THE DESTRUCTIVE DESIRES THAT LEAD TO ENMITY WITH OTHERS. I KNOW WE CAN’T BEGIN TO PRACTICE THE FAITH OUTWARDLY, IF WE DON’T START WITH LETTING CHRIST HEAL OUR INNER LIFE.

THIRD, TO WIN THE WAR WITHIN WE NEED THE RIGHT OF BATTLE PLAN. JAMES REMINDS US THAT PUTTING AWAY DESIRES THAT LEAD TO SINFUL ACTS, PUTTING AWAY ENVY AND JEALOUSY THAT CAN LEAD TO DISASTROUS RELATIONSHIPS, IS NOT EASY. IT IS ONGOING. IT IS CONSTANTLY REQUIRING OUR INNER VIGILANCE OF FAITH, OBSERVING OURSELVES, AS TO WHETHER WE ARE LOVING AND CARING ACCORDING TO GOD’S PLAN FOR US, NOT OUR PLAN’S FOR GOD? ARE WE MORE INTERESTED IN PURSUING GOD’S PRESENCE RATHER THAN HAVING WHAT, IN THE END, WILL NOT BRING US JOY?

CONVERSION TO CHRIST, THE WAR WITHIN, IS AN ONGOING PROCESS THROUGHOUT LIFE. CHRISTIAN FAITH IS A LIFELONG PROCESS OF CHARACTER BUILDING, OF FAITH DEEPENING, OF SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY

THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND DEEDS. CONSISTENT FAITH OVER TIME, GUIDED BY GOD'S WORD.

THE FAITH IS CONSISTENT IN ITS TEACHING. THE VIOLENCE AND DISRUPTION, THE QUARRELING AND THE ANIMOSITY IN THIS WORLD COMES FROM INSIDE OF US. THAT IS WHERE THE BATTLE NEEDS TO BE FOUGHT TO BE MORE LOVING, MORE PEACFEUL, MORE JOYFUL, AND FILLED WITH HOPE FOR A POSITIVE OUTCOME TO LIFE. HOW ARE YOU TREATING YOUR INSIDES THESE DAYS? AMEN.