

A FAITH THAT WORKS

(A Study of the Book of James)

Wise Counsel for a Peace-filled Christmas

TEXT: James 4:1-10

INTRODUCTION: *Isaiah 9:6* For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; ... And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**.

Among the titles, the Spirit announced through Isaiah for the coming Son of God was Prince of Peace. Yet, I find a lot of people do not have peace during the Christmas Season.

We all want peace, at least most of us do. We want

- **A lack of conflict** among those who are dear to us and important to us.
- We want **a sense of contentment inside**, in our heart, in our soul.
- We want to have **an inner awareness that things are OK**.

All of these are a part of the Biblical words for peace – Shalom in the Old Testament, Ereine in the New. **PEACE ...**

But many people, even Christians, lack that kind of peace, even at Christmas time.

The Wonderful Counselor offers us some wise counsel that can help us with the lack of peace in our souls. These words are not just for the Christmas season, but they certainly apply. Maybe they are needed right now more than any other time of the year.

As we read the beginning of James 4, listen for two main things?

1. **What causes a lack of peace in our hearts?**
2. **What can solve this and put peace within us?**

James 4:1–10 1 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for pleasure* that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*” 7 Therefore submit 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-

mindful. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Do you see that the Holy Spirit is addressing those times when we do not have peace in our lives and in our hearts?

May I do a little paraphrasing that incorporates some word meanings and the context to try to make the explanation clear? You follow the text on the screen while I offer a Bro. Mike paraphrase.

SCRIPTURE	PARAPHRASE
Where do wars and fights come from among you?	Where do the battles and conflicts (that take away your peace) come from?
Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?	They originate inside of you as your conflicting desires do battle with each other.
You lust and do not have.	You have strong desires but they are not fulfilled.
You murder and covet and cannot obtain. ... Adulterers and adulteresses!	Sometimes you will do almost anything to try to attain what you want, even up to wanting to take it from someone else or even killing them for it to getting it in a very improper way like adulterers do.
You fight and war.	But that just leads to more conflict and battle.
Yet you do not have	The basic problem is that you do not have what you so desperately want. So, why don't you have it?
because you do not ask	a. Because you have not asked God for it.
You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.	b. Because you have asked God for something that will ultimately do you harm, and God won't give you that.

So, let's look at those two questions.

I. WHAT CAUSES A LACK OF PEACE IN OUR HEARTS?

God says the cause is an inner battle between unfulfilled desires.

• I want to buy nice presents for family members.	• I don't want to increase my credit card debt.
• I want a good relationship with people at work.	• I really hate going to the company party.
• I need (and kind of want) to spend some time with family and friends.	• I really want to just get away alone on a vacation!
• I love some things about Christmas a whole lot.	• Some of the pressures that come with the season just spoil it for me.
• You can probably add your own to the list.	•

II. WHAT CAN SOLVE THIS AND PUT PEACE WITHIN US?

A. Ask God to grant your righteous desires.

1. James says that sometimes the reason we don't have is simply because we have not asked.
2. Sometimes, we may have asked, but we have not asked the One Who has the power to grant our request.

The direct instruction of Jesus here is helpful.

Matthew 7:7–11 7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Notice here, that Jesus is talking about asking for good things, seeking righteous things, knocking on doors that lead to places we ought to go. **God delights to give good gifts to His children!**

Like you, God does not want to give things to His children that will harm them, no matter how much they ask.

- If your child asks for a fish, you would not give him a serpent.
- If your child asks for a serpent, you still would not give him a serpent.

You say, oh, Bro. Mike, what child would ask for a serpent?

I would answer you, mine did! My son Jeremy, sitting right here in worship with us, did! Well actually, he didn't ask. He just brought the snake home. And it wasn't a garden snake. It was an Anaconda!

I would not let Jeremy keep his Anaconda.

Jesus' promise that if we ask we will receive, **does not mean He will give us our Anacondas** or even if we get them by our own power that He will let us keep them.

But it does mean that He will grant our righteous desires that will genuinely be good for us. He will grant them at the time He knows is right and best.

So, what do we do about the other desires, either those we pretty well know are not right or best, and others we really are not sure about?

The instruction is

B. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

- James explains that there is a choice to be made here. He says, when your desires are conflicted, you have to choose directions. You have to choose friends.
 - Either you will be the friend of the world and the ruler of this world
 - Or you will choose to be the friend of God and be ruled by God.

That is why he says "Submit to God."
He says you cannot be friends of both.

But James reminds us of a wonderful truth. God is not impartial concerning your choice. God is not just the Judge sitting up above waiting to see what you will do to see if He needs to drop the hammer.

James 4:5 ... "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"

That means that the Holy Spirit Who dwells inside of you, Christian brother,
The Holy Spirit who lives within you believing sister,
Is jealous for your friendship, for your choice, for your fellowship.

That is why you feel a leading toward the right choice, a nudge in the direction of choosing friendship with God over the world, an insight in your mind telling you that is the choice that will be productive and good for you.

And if you will do that.

If when you have desires you know are not really right,

Or you have desires you are not sure about,

**If you will submit to God,
saying I yield my choice to You.**

I want Your way.

I want to be friends with You more than friends with the world.

God will give you grace!

Remember what grace is!

- **God's Riches at Christ's Expense**
- **God's unmerited favor**
- **God's goodness far beyond what we can deserve**

So, my friend, not only will God not give His children a stone when they ask for bread,

but when they ask for a stone, thinking that this particular rock just looks delicious if I could sink my teeth into it,

if they will submit to Him and draw near to Him,

God will often give them bread in place of the stone!

CONCLUSION – I believe the most conflicted, worrisome, peace-less times in my life were in my early years of high school.

- I loved mathematics and science, especially physics.
- I also loved debate and was intrigued with the prospect of becoming a lawyer.
- I definitely wanted to go to a prestigious university and had by my junior year applied to both Harvard and Yale.
- I was already a Christian and attending church regularly.
- But I worried a lot, felt conflicting desires within, and had little peace inside.
- The thought that God had plans for me beyond being a physicist or a scientist had never even entered my mind.
- But out of the inner turmoil, I was challenged to
 - draw near to God
 - seek what He wanted
 - to submit to Him
- Ultimately I did.
- I had to abandon some of the old desires, but God gave me the grace to do so.
- I had to change plans previous made, but it was not difficult with God's help.
- And it brought me to a place of peace within.