

## Written Copy: James 4:4-10 "What Are You Zealous for?"

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 20

Sunday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024

### **The Text: James 4:4-10**

<sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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"? <sup>6</sup>But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup>Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

### **The text's intent**

We often live to please our sinful selfish heart jealously yearning for what we can't and shouldn't have, and living to please ourselves instead of our Lord, whose will and plan for us is always best. We live in opposition to God when we live to satisfy our sinful desires instead of putting His will and plan first, and sharing His love by sacrificially serving others. In doing so we fall into the plan of Satan who wants to draw us away from God, seeing sin as no big deal, and then making us believe we can't be forgiven. But the Lord yearns jealously for us, having sent His only Son to suffer and die, saving us from Satan's grasp. He uses the Law, preached and not preached to show us how we are turned in on ourself, humble us in repentance, where we turn back and draw close to Him again in love and obedience to His will and plan. In doing so we find Him drawing close to us through the Word and Sacrament. He breaks our heart as we confess and then raises us up through the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness. We can turn back to Him only because He first drew close to us in baptism.

### **Focus Statement:**

Even though we yearn Zealously to please our sinful heart, the Lord yearns zealously for us. He loves us so much He gave the ultimate selfless sacrifice to forgive us for our disobedience and save us from the devil's grasp. He drew close to us first in baptism and continues to work to draw us back to Him in repentance. He creates and maintains in us the new heart that begins to desire and follow His will in obedience to Him and love toward others.

### **Function Statement:**

#### **Why it's important to know:**

We yearn zealously to live to please ourselves at the expense of putting God's will and plan first in our life, and sacrificially loving and caring for others ahead of our own desires. This causes strife with others, unhappiness within us, and works in conjunction with the devil's scheme to draw us away from faith in our God.

#### **What the hearer should do as a result:**

Work with the Spirit as He creates and keeps us in repentant faith, using the Law preached and not preached to move us from being turned inward on ourself, to turned outward toward loving obedience to Him and loving service toward others.

### **Subject Sentence: We are zealous to sin, but Christ is zealous to save**

## Introduction: Rick's Jealousy in Casablanca

How many of you are familiar with the classic movie Casablanca starring Humphry Bogart? I was never a fan of movies made before the 1970's. But I had to watch Casablanca as part of a film appreciation class I took as an elective in college toward my Communications Degree. And now I consider it one of my favorite movies.

For those of you unfamiliar with it, it takes place during World War II. Humphry Bogart plays an American named Rick who owns a night club in Casablanca, the largest city in Morocco, which at that time was still controlled by France. But the Germans were on the move and by this time already controlled a large portion of mainland France. Rick seems unwilling or unable to return to America. The reason why is left as something of a mystery. He seems to have an ambivalent attitude toward the war and its outcome, as he does with many other things. He repeatedly says, "I stick my neck out for nobody." He lives by this saying even when the authorities are after a good friend who has stolen "letters of transit". These letters would allow the bearer to escape from Casablanca and head to freedom in America with no questions asked. He gives these letters to Rick for safe keeping. When the authorities come for his friend, rather than hiding him, Rick stands by while his friend tries to escape and ends up being shot and killed. When people remark on Rick's ambivalence toward a friend's plight, he repeats his mantra, "I stick my neck out for nobody."

Rick seems to be holding on to those letters to use only for himself. And then in walks Ilsa, played by Ingrid Bergman. Ilsa and Rick had a love relationship back in Paris years before. When the Germans come bearing down on the city both plan to escape. They are supposed to meet at the train station. But Ilsa is a no-show, instead sending a letter saying she can't come and can't explain why. Rick is left holding the letter as the rain pours down, like tears from heaven, making the ink run. He boards the train with a broken heart that will turn to his selfish uncaring attitude.

Years later, Ilsa shows up at Rick's, not alone, but with a man she introduces to everyone as her husband. You can imagine how deeply this opens old wounds for both. It turns out that when she knew Rick in Paris, she thought her husband, who was a leader of the underground French resistance, had been captured and killed by Nazis. Then, just before she was to meet Rick and leave Paris, she finds out he's still alive but injured. That was the reason she didn't board the train with Rick.

Ilsa and her husband show up at Casablanca on the run from the Nazis who are seeking to capture and torture him for information. They hear about the letters of transit and that Rick probably has them. But Rick's heart, which was hardened before, is crushed to pieces once again with Ilsa showing up with a husband. When her husband asks Rick about the letters, Rick refuses to give them to him, telling him that he should ask his wife about the reason why. Jealousy was ruling in his heart. He eventually agrees to use the letters of transit to leave Casablanca, but only with Ilsa. Because of his jealous heart, he refuses to help her husband in any way.

## What Do You Jealously Zealously Yearn For?

Well, that's the movies. But perhaps you can relate to the situation that Rick, Ilsa, and her husband find themselves in. Perhaps you've been hurt in the past in a similar situation. There was a Rock n Roll song in the 1970's called "Love Hurts". All of us at times could probably relate. All of us at one time or another have suffered from hearts hardened by jealousy.

**James 3:13-14** <sup>13</sup> **Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.** <sup>14</sup> **But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.**

James gives us the brutally honest truth about how we live out our lives in this world. Keep in mind James is writing to the Church, to Christians who are supposed to be following Jesus. As Christians we are called to live in the meekness of godly wisdom. This word "meekness" is not synonymous with the word "weakness". Meekness here means having a strength, power, and ability that is kept under control. Godly wisdom tells us that although we can choose to do what we want with what we've been given by God, our choices should be filled with a zealous love for God that shows itself in being zealous to do good works for others.

The words zealous and jealous are related to one another, especially when it comes to our personal ambitions and how they direct our lives in this fallen world. What James is describing here in these verses is how we often live zealously to please our own sinful desires and ambitions. We want what we want when we want it. And we are jealous of what we see as belonging to us and what we are due, and we struggle to share these things.

What exactly are these things? How about your time, your talents, and your treasures. My time is my time. I don't mind sharing some of it with a friend who is in need. But if it seems they are requiring too much of my time, if my helping them is taking too long, too much time away from what I have planned and what I want to do, then I get jealous about sharing any more. The same goes for my wallet. If we are honest, most of us struggle with how much we should give back to God as offerings to the Church, let alone helping out missions

and others in need. We are zealous about spending time and money on ourselves, but jealous and stingy when it comes to sharing with others.

Now granted, there are times when we do share. But if we are honest, and take a good look at our hearts, is there not a reluctance buried in there, one that we would never admit to others, let alone ourselves? And how often, when we do share with others, do we expect something in return? While we may be willing to share with family and friends, how reluctant are we to share with those outside of this circle?

**James 4:1-3** <sup>1</sup> **What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?** <sup>2</sup> **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.** <sup>3</sup> **You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.**

What kind of a life is James describing here? It's a "life turned in on itself". It's when my ambitions and desires rule the day. It's the way people outside of the Church and in the world live day in and day out.

Perhaps you can see it in your prayer life. We can pray for anything. But how often do we see prayer as me trying to cajole and coerce God into answering the way I want Him to. This is what I want Lord, this is what needs to happen. If you love me you'll see it my way and answer. We forget that all prayers should end "in Jesus' name", meaning "I want you to answer according to what you know is best, and give me the ability to except that, even if it's the opposite of what I'm desiring." That's an easy thing to say. How hard is that to live that out sometimes?

**Romans 12:1** **I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

What kind of life does God call us to live? We are called to live focused on obeying God, His commands, and His will first and foremost. And what does He command us to do? Love one another, as He has loved us: sacrificially and unconditionally. We might do that, sort of. But if we are honest, we are pretty big on conditions. I'm willing to sacrifice myself when it's convenient, and do so for those who might do the same for me. But it's a totally different thing when it means making a sacrifice for someone who can't or won't do the same in return.

Why do we have quarrels and arguments? Because we live turned in on ourselves. We want to be right, and we want to have our way. And we find it increasingly difficult to accept that other people might have a different idea and point of view on things. If you want an example of this just take a good look on Facebook. It's the Cancel Culture in full swing. I will accept you as a friend and like your posts as long as they agree with my point of view. But if

you, God forbid, see things differently, then I have no patience to work things out or understand where you are coming from. I will chastise you, castigate you, dress you down, and if you put up any resistance, cancel you.

That's how the world lives. James talks about the passions at war within us. We know deep down these things are wrong. But what happens to you when you are in the heat of an argument. What happens to love, forgiveness, and understanding? It flies right out the window.

**James 4:4 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 does James say about us when we live like the world lives? When we live zealously allowing passions and desires to rule, when we live jealously guarding what we believe belongs to us alone, we live as enemies of God Himself.

## **How the Lord Jealously Zealously Yearns for You**

**James 4:5 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**

"So, what is the good word in all of this?? We yearn zealously and jealously to sin and turn away from God, but He yearns jealously and zealously for you!

How zealous is He over you and your life? He sent His only Son to provide the ultimate sacrifice on your behalf. Motivated by the highest love, sacrificial and unconditional, He was condemned and put to death to pay the price for your zealous desire to live turned in on yourself. He gave His life for all the ways you choose to please yourself at the expense of obeying God and loving others as Jesus has loved you. Jesus came so that you would not be judged guilty, not because you never did these things, because you and I have repeatedly. You go free because He stood in your place, was charged with your sin, and went to the cross to suffer and die for it, so that it will never be held against you.

How zealous and jealous is our God for you? He sent His Spirit into your life in your baptism to change your status from being a child of Satan to now declare you to be His own precious child. He gives you the Holy Spirit to live in you and work on your spirit to keep you as His very own. He gave so much to make you His own. He is jealous for you, not wanting to share you with any other gods, not with the world, and not even when you worship yourself.

## **How to Remain Zealously in Repentant Faith**

**James 4:8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

How does God want us to live believing and holding fast to this? What is James talking about here? Well, we can't stop sinning. We wake up every morning focused inward on ourselves, jealous concerning what we want and need for the day, and often uncaring about the needs of others.

But the answer James presents to us is living in repentant faith. It's taking an honest look at how often we live to please ourselves and the ways we manifest that attitude and ambition in our thoughts, words, and actions. And then He turns us from that and back to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We turn and confess to Him those things the Holy Spirit brings to mind that bother us, as well as our general nature of being jealous and uncaring with our time, talents, treasures, and life. We lift these things up to Him in confession because we already know the answer from Jesus: **"You are forgiven!"**

Living in repentant faith is knowing we are often wrong, often selfish, often jealously withholding our stuff and ourselves from God and others. But it means also knowing and believing that Jesus is the answer and the ultimate cure for this. It means believing that He has a jealous and zealous love for you that showed itself in His life, death, and resurrection.

## Conclusion

Think back to how the movie Casablanca ends. Rick has a change of heart about helping Ilsa and her husband. He ends up putting his life on the line so that they could have those letters of transit and escape to America. He does this even though he still loves her. Her husband is important to the underground movement fighting against Nazi Germany. Rick realizes there are things more important than his own jealousy and selfish needs.

How does a change like that happen in our lives? When that Zealous Spirit that Christ has given to us works on us through the Means of Grace, moving us to confess and ask forgiveness for our jealous selfish ambitions and behavior. And in place of them He works to create in us a zealous desire to be better stewards of the gracious gifts that God has given to us. He works in us to move us to sacrifice our time in the study of His Word so that we might learn better how He desires us to live. And when you do this, you will find that as you draw closer to Him, He is drawing closer to you. It means working with the Spirit to put what He is teaching you into practice with those He brings into your life who have needs. It means asking the Spirit to help us be more understanding, more forgiving, more loving, less jealous with our time, and more zealous in serving God and loving others. And because our

Lord is zealous and jealous for you, He will certainly keep working to keep you in repentant faith all the way to life everlasting. Amen.