

## **“THE BEGINNING AND ENDING OF WARS.”**

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**Scripture Text: James 4:1-12**

### **Introduction.**

If you have been out to Friday Harbor on San Juan Island and spent any time there you know there are two historical military sites there, the American Camp and the British Camp. And if you know that then you know about the war that almost broke out called the Pig War of 1859. An American farmer, Lyman Cutler, shot a pig that was eating his garden. Turns out the pig belonged to an Irishman and things escalated from there.

History is filled with actual wars started over very minor incidents that got out of control.

The War of the Whiskers, 1152-1453.

The War of the Oaken Bucket, 1325.

The War of Jenkins' Ear, 1739-1748.

The Toledo War, 1803-1836. “Thank God, I never liked Michigan weather anyway.”

We all know how wars can begin in our homes. Do any of you remember a news story in Enumclaw in 1985 when a man got a legal demolition permit and bulldozed his two year old house his wife wanted in a divorce settlement?

How about the 1994 story in Parris, Texas when their high school's Christmas concert was canceled after the chorus teacher allegedly smashed a chair on the band director over who would give the announcements.

The Wars in the Middle East and Africa are just macrocosms of the wars and quarrels that rage in our hearts and homes and neighborhoods and schools and churches. The world news is just a mirror to our family news.

James chapter 3 ends with a contrast between wisdom from the world and wisdom from above. Worldly wisdom is full of jealousy and selfish ambition, strife and disorder. Wisdom from above is pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason.

Now James fleshes out what happens when we live according to the world and our flesh and fleshly passions and desires.

**The origin and nature of strife is desires within us, 4:1-5, 11-12.**

What is the cause of quarrels and fights, of strife and war, whether international or interpersonal? James says it the passions and desires that are already present and at war within us.

In other words, anger is never original. Anger is a response. Anger is a whistle blower emotion. It rats out what's really down in our heart. Anger is symptomatic of something we find personally displeasing and unacceptable.

This means if you want to get honest and really deal with your anger you are going to have to do some digging to get down to the root cause. And you aren't alone.

***Anger is a universal sin.*** It's common among all people of all ages in all cultures in all times.

Scripture says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We can also say all have been angry. After the fall of Adam, the next sin we encounter is Cain's anger with Abel.

Anger has been around since the first things started going wrong, since the first things didn't go the way we want or expected. Anger may be the first sin we all commit. As infants we wail and cry because we find something unacceptable, intolerable.

We aren't fed fast enough.

We aren't changed soon enough.

We aren't held long enough.

We aren't getting the attention we want.

Baby's express an all-consuming rage, they haven't learned the appropriate social skills for bottling it up or stuffing it. Then as children we encounter a constant stream of unacceptable realities which we feel obligated to make sure everyone else knows.

Someone isn't sharing My Little Pony or the PS4 controller.

Someone got an sixteenth of an inch larger piece of cake.

Someone has to go to bed before someone else.

Then we finally mature into perfectly sensible adults, who surely have a much better grasp on reality and what is acceptable and unacceptable.

Until someone cuts us off in traffic or drives too slow.

Until someone makes a big mess in our garage or car.

Until someone spends too much money on something clearly unnecessary.

Until someone makes us late for church or some event.

Until someone does one of those "What were you thinking?" things.

Until you miss place your keys or an appliance breaks again.

We all get angry, we just express it in different ways, some of us flash quickly and then move on, others go into a slow burn. Some let it out, some keep it in; some loudly, some secretly.

*Anger rises from within, from our desires and passions.*

We know the opposite of pride is humility and the opposite of greed is generosity. What's the opposite of anger? We are inclined to say love but it's not, the opposite is indifference. We don't get angry about what we don't care about. Anger is actually a kind of love.

Anger rises out of what we love. To find the source examine what you love. What do we love most? We love ourselves most. And love for ourselves is usually selfish and self-centered. When what I love and care about is threatened I will often respond with anger. I want my way, I don't want anything to infringe on my time or energy or interests or pleasures or comfort.

Sinful anger is an inappropriate and disproportionate response to some reality I deem unacceptable because I am blind to my self-consumed love.

If I get angry when someone makes me late it's because my time and my life are all important.

If I get angry at traffic it's because my time and my desires trump everyone else's.

If I get angry over some big mess it's because it's going to cost me or inconvenience me.

If I get angry when someone else does something that affects me or messes up my plan it's because my expectations weren't met.

If I get angry over my kid's behavior it's because I see it as a reflection on my parenting and my ability to raise good and decent and self-control human beings.

If I get angry over my kid's sin it's because it exposes my sin and I don't like that.

If I get angry when I make a big mistake or do something foolish it's because I am looking for significance and security in other people's approval. I love my own reputation or status in the eyes of others far too much.

Anger is our explosive response to our deeply flawed affection for our self, our passionate desire to have what we want the way we want it. If we get angry a lot it is a clear sign that we love our self too much and have way too high a view of our self.

Our sinful anger is not about someone or something else, it is about us and our lust or desire for control, comfort, a hassle-free life, attention, respect, power, vindication, and on and on.

Phama and I work at not saying, "You made me angry" but rather "I chose to be angry because."

James says part of the problem is we don't take our desires to God, we don't seek Him and His will in prayer. We are trying to gain what we want by our own means.

How often did the kings of the OT get into trouble when they didn't first inquire of the Lord?

Another part of the problem is that our desires spoil our prayers and render them sinful and unanswerable. We ask for God's blessing or success or help, but with the intent of using the blessing for our own purposes, to gratify our own desires and not to glorify Him or advance His kingdom.

## *You adulterous people.*

Does anyone here remember Janis Joplin's 1970 hit "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz? My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends. Oh Lord, won't you buy me a color TV? Oh Lord, won't you buy me a night on the town?"

What is she asking God do? Do you see that this is an adulterous prayer? It's like asking her husband to give her money to spend on an affair. She was exposing how we ask God to give us the desires of our hearts, to serve our lusts and idols.

Love for the world and for worldly things and worldly passions and pleasures is adultery toward God. When we try to exploit God's grace to make friends with God's enemy, that's adultery.

This is what James means when he calls out our adultery. We want God to fund our friendship with the world which in turn makes us an enemy of God. And then we wonder why God doesn't answer our prayers. It's because God is a jealous God and He will not be party to our idolatry or adultery or friendship with the world or our selfish cravings for what we want.

We want God to fulfil all our wants, instead of learning to control our appetites and desires by subjecting them to God.

## **The cure of strife is humility before God, 4:6-10.**

There is hope for our anger. As I Corinthians 10:13 says God always provides a way of escape, a way out.

It's clear and simple enough, but hard, because we are fighting uphill against our old sin nature and an enemy of our souls who doesn't want us to make progress or gain victory.

## *Submit to God and draw near to God.*

Notice the cure doesn't involve someone else, it doesn't call for a change of someone else's heart. The cure is completely focused on us, on you and on me.

To lay the axe to the root of anger will mean cutting in our own hearts and not somewhere else.

The cure to sinful self-love and the anger that flows from it is to recognize it, name it, confess it, and turn to God to recalibrate what is our greatest love and affection.

We are all motivated by desires and passions. When we turn to God we are seeking to change the desires of our hearts, to reorient our love toward God and others before ourselves. We want to have a change of heart, to want what God wants for us and others. We don't need to have our felt needs validated, we need to have them transformed to what's pleasing to God.

Submit your desires to Him, submit your wills to Him, submit your preferences, submit control to Him, submit the outcome to Him. If we draw near to God we have hope and help. Call on Him and He will answer. He will not fail us.

***Cleanse your hands and purify your hearts.***

This is a call to purity through self-examination and repentance. Purge and purify our soul by finding out what is soiling and spoiling our hands and heart. We need to do an examination to find the disease.

Ask God to open your eyes to your blindness concerning your self-love. Ask God to show you the root system that is feeding your anger, the underlying idols or inordinate loves.

We will not begin to get a handle on our anger until we can see the underlying motives in our own heart, the cravings and desires that are the catalysts to all conflict.

Children are really clear about the causes of their anger and they will tell you. "I want ... or I don't have ... or I don't want to ..."

God asked Cain why was he angry at Abel. He wants us to find the root. When Jonah was so angry with God for sending him to Nineveh and opening the door to them for repentance, God came to Jonah and asked him, "What do you have to be angry about?"

That's a revealing questions and a cleansing and purifying question, it gets to the heart.

Ask yourself, "Why am I so angry? What do I have to be so angry about? What is so important to me that I am getting this defensive or this emotional? What am I loving so much that pushes my buttons this much?"

One of the most frequent causes of anger when our kids were younger was their disobedience. Now it's right to be appropriately upset with sinful disobedience. My love for them should care deeply about their rebellion. But the problem was that often my anger was because of my inconvenience, I had to interrupt what I wanted to do; or that I was embarrassed by their behavior. So my discipline became ineffective because it was about me and not about them and my love for them. My sin clouded their ability to see and deal with the sin in their own hearts.

Ask yourself, "What am I so angry about? What am I loving so much that pushes my buttons this much?"

***Mourn and weep.***

Mourn and weep, get real, get personal, cultivate a genuine sorrow for our sin and our destructive anger in our relationships.

Don't be glib or casual or flip or dismissive. Don't cast blame, or make excuses, or give three reasons. Don't be trivial about something so serious. Don't try so hard to protect your embarrassed or wounded ego. We should be sad when we get angry in the way we do and for the reasons we do. It is usually petty and foolish.

When you own your sin, own it, and when you repent and ask forgiveness do it in all seriousness; show you get that what you did has offended God and hurt others.

Fighting and strife and division and anger should be cause for sadness, and cause for serious prayer and turning to God and seeking reconciliation.

Yes, it's painful, but because of grace and forgiveness the pain isn't permanent. Those who humble themselves will be lifted up by God's grace.

### *Cultivate a life of forgiveness.*

Don't let your heart grow cold or hard. Seek for and ask for forgiveness from your spouse and your children and your friends and church members every time. With every angry outburst go back and clean up the mess as best you can. Make yourself do it. Humble yourself before God and each other. This is Gospel grace, this is loving God and others more than yourself. Don't give the devil a foothold.

Are you willing to seek reconciliation with any one in your life with whom you are at odds?

Don't move inward into depression or despair or remorse or beating yourself up. Move upward toward God in repentance and outward toward others making peace in repentance, humility and love. Forgiveness connects us to God's grace and brings with it more grace.

It is one of the paradoxes of the Gospel of Jesus that those who die to themselves and their desires are the one who find life and peace and joy. To be set free from the tyranny of our own hearts desires, sets us free to pursue peace and love.

Make God the love of your heart and He will enable you to defeat the root of your anger.

The answer to ending wars whether international or interpersonal is our learning to fight the right enemy, to do battle with Satan and to do battle with the sinful passions and desires in our own hearts.

Because of Jesus we have the hope of victory. Make Him your highest and best desire, your supreme treasure.

**Psalm 37:4** Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.