

Sermon – 9-23-2018
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
James 3-4
By
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We like to think that we can judge ourselves pretty well. We believe that we know ourselves better than anyone else. But just like all things in our lives, our self-perception is fallen, because of sin. We just lie to ourselves over and over again. And it's usually a pretty rosy lie. The specific one I'm thinking of is one I tell myself too: I'm pretty wise. I'm pretty understanding. I get it. Well, let's see what James has to say about your wisdom and mine.

James 3:13-4:10

*****read 3:13-18*****

James kind of slips it in there, but it's important to note that in verse 14, he doesn't want us to "deny the truth". And he even slips something by us English speakers too, but his Greek hearers would have gotten it. It's in the tiny word "if." For us, that means uncertainty: we're not sure if you have envy and ambition in your heart. But there are actually three ways to write conditional sentences in Greek. This one is not like what we usually think of. If we translated what verse 14 is actually saying into English, it might

sound more like this: "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, *and you do!*, do not boast about it or deny the truth. James is actually telling us what the truth is. And what does verse 16 tell us we do with those things? We find disorder and every evil practice.

This is what lying to ourselves does. In our lives, we try to prove to others that we are what we believe we are. But in that, we're focused on ourselves. We become so busy trying to prove to others that we are wise and knowledgeable, that we forget that the other people are the ones we are there to listen to, and interact with, and care for. And we show our sinful true colors: we look for the battles. The battles show who's better, and that's us, right? We don't consider others' feelings or understandings. We will not submit, because then they've won. No mercy. No surrender. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Whatever you need to say to get the job done, that's what you need to say.

I did this myself. In some theological controversies in a previous church that I served, I would try to find anyone and everyone who agreed with my conclusion, and then we'd all be together, and my side would have more "firepower". I look back on it now, and I aligned myself with some people that I really disagree with, and people that really treated others with contempt and partiality. In fact, I probably did some of that

myself. That was my sinful nature taking over, even when I thought, and still believe, that I was on the side of truth. And that brings out a false sense of security. Isaiah shows us what happens then.

Isaiah 32:9-20

Specifically here, Isaiah is speaking toward complacent women, but as you know, Isaiah is an equal opportunity prophet, so this applies to *everyone*.

*****read*****

There are many terrible things that happen when we enter into our complacency and superiority. The harvest fails. The land is overgrown. The city is abandoned. Because of our superiority complexes, things that we care about die. And yet, what does Isaiah say is the step that changes all of this? The Spirit being poured from on high. He is the only person that can change any of what we do to ourselves and do to others. He is the one who truly knows all truth? So, if we're going to seek to be peacemakers, instead of warmakers, what do we do? For that, go back to James. He's talking some here about what comes from our selfish ambition and envy, fights and quarrels. But once he gets to verse 7, he gives us the guidance we need.

*****read 4:1-10*****

James is talking about nothing other than *repentance*. In order to leave behind our quarrels and our self-centeredness and our stubbornness, we need to offer

that to God. There are three parts to true repentance: confessing the truth to God and to those we have hurt, being contrite (being sorry), and seeking to change our ways. And we are called to *show* that we are sorry.

When one of my kids does something wrong, we make them apologize, but if the tone isn't right, they have to apologize again. Why would we expect less than that from our repentance toward God? We are called to show that we take seriously all three parts of that repentance. Of course, we're still sinners, and we will still make mistakes. But to acknowledge the sin, to be sorry for the sin, and to work toward avoiding the sin in the future shows a lot of humility, and Jesus wants that from us. He told us so.

Mark 9:30-37

Jesus even gives an example of humility, and it goes right over the disciples' heads.

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The example, of course, is *himself*. If there's anyone who would have a "right" to be self-centered, it would be Jesus. He's God, after all. And yet, he tells them he's going to the cross. What does this spur on? An argument amongst the disciples over who is the greatest. So, he makes it clear. He tells them to find humility. He tells them to be last, and the servant of all. He even puts a child in their midst, saying this is the one to be like. Now, kids can have overconfidence just like any adult, but they also know that they can't

do this world on their own. We have to know that no matter how wise and sharp we think we are, we can't do this world on our own. We need Christ to take the sin from within us, and replace it with his life, replace it with the Holy Spirit, who works in and through us in this world. And that's exactly what he does, with his death and resurrection. He does not lie to us. He knows our sin. He knows his forgiveness, and that is what he gives to us, each and every day. AMEN.