

### (What to do) When Trouble Brews – James 4:1-5

Happy Mother's Day – God bless you in your role

With that privilege comes great responsibility; Want to encourage you in it; Thanks

Having just wrapped up our Missions Conference . . .

Want to commend you for how you welcomed our Global Partners and the other missionaries who were here

They were so encouraged by you, and all that God is doing here

One of them wrote this – “Dear Rob, There is virtually no way I can express to you how much of a blessing your people were to me. The ministry that weekend had to be listed as one of the highlights of my all time ministry.”

Thank you for that; Makes me very proud

- Back to James; Get Serious About Your Walk series

Left off at James 4; Characteristic of the first 3 chapters . . .

James is once again in our face w/ strong words, in order to get at hearts w/ God's truth  
At issue, is infighting among believers; Fighting in the church

I've called it – When Trouble Brews; James 4:1-5

Story – young dad heard commotion in backyard

Looked out window; Saw son/daughter and few of their friends yelling at each other

Stepped out on the deck – hey, what's all the fighting about?

His daughter responds, “Nothing Dad, we're just playing church”

Unfortunately, that's far more common than we'd like to think; And James addresses it . . .

By laying out cause of trouble among us, James urges us by implication, to do gut check  
To assess our hearts and lives, and see if there be any wicked way in us (like David wrote so long ago in Ps 139)

Read James 4:1-5 (comment on peace of previous verse)

When trouble brews . . .

#### **Check your passions (v1-2a)**

Starts with asking yourself the hard questions

Like – What's the cause? Why all the friction? Am I part of the problem?

If you're unwilling to even ask the question, you won't check anything

James wastes no time in doing so in v1 – *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?*

Likewise, wastes no time in getting right to the point . . .

1b – *Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*

Is not the cause of your trouble your desires?

Your desire for power, influence, control, pleasure, recognition?

Are not those the passions/desires that give you the most trouble in life? Sure they are

When trouble brews, it starts with the warring passions in your heart

Passions, that if left unchecked, *will* boil over like v2 says . . .

2a – *You desire and do not have, so you murder*

What? In the church? Is that possible?

As disturbing as it is, and while we can't imagine it here, the answer is yes – history is littered with such atrocities

Like Rwanda 1994 when Hutus were killing Tutsis, even though they were members of the same church in some cases

Or the Anabaptists in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. who were put to death by drowning, for their belief in believer's baptism by immersion

Those who controlled the church at that time, felt it was a fitting punishment for their “aberrant” belief

God help us when our desire for power and position is so intense, that we're willing to kill for it, even in the church

*You desire and do not have, so you murder*

Then he says, striking a bit closer to home . . .

- 2a – *You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*

Covet what? What do people with wayward passions in church, covet most?

I think it's control and recognition

One of the hardest things for us to do in life, and especially in the church, is *follow*

We want control; We want to be in charge

Especially if we're gifted with some leadership that way

And when we don't get control to our liking, we pick a fight, and eventually take our issues elsewhere

Which is good for the church you're leaving, and bad for the one you're going to

Knowing how to follow is crucial for unity in the body of Christ

It's one of the biggest lessons I've had to learn in my life

- Then there's recognition – oh do we covet recognition

When trouble brews, check your passion for recognition

Check your desire to be noticed and known

This is a killer – of unity, godliness, worship, churches

We must always check our passion to be known and recognized

Otherwise, it will cloud our thinking, adversely influence our decisions, and lead to a lust for power that results in fights, quarrels, and inevitably separation

When trouble brews, check your passions

As in, assess them, and stop them

Because if there's war on in the inside, there will inevitably be war on the outside

#### **Check your prayers (v2b)**

2b – *You do not have because you do not ask.*

He doesn't explicitly say what they lack

It could be position – that would fit with the preceding chapter where a desire to teach was addressed

It could be wisdom that they lack, because they haven't asked – we've seen that

But I think James intentionally leaves it vague in order to encompass anything that we lack and need – whether things, influence, peace, or wisdom

It's wide open – *you do not have* (whatever it is), *because you do not ask*

God doesn't give you what you want or need, because you haven't ask for it

- Now, how much has that verse been abused? A lot!  
 “All I have to do is ask, and poof, God will give it;” Not; It’s not a magic mantra  
 The Bible also says we have to ask in faith; *And*, according to God’s will  
 1 Jn 5:14-15 – he does not grant our requests unless they are according to his will
- So this truth in James is not a blank check from God  
 I don’t care how often you name it and claim it; Or how much you presume on God by saying “it’s already happened; I believe”  
 Just because you ask, doesn’t mean you get
- Nor does it mean that God will withhold all things good and necessary for our lives if we fail to ask for everything single thing, every single minute of the day  
 That would be rather impractical, even impossible, assuming we even *knew* all that we needed, which we don’t  
 So that’s not in view here either
- What *is* in view is that a *failure* to ask, *could* mean a *failure* to receive  
 There *are* times, according to this verse, when we *do* need to ask  
 Times when God has so ordained the situation that he *requires* our request in order to meet our need  
 Times when he wants to do a work in our heart through our *asking*, as much as he wants to do a work in the world by his *answering*
- There are times when we *do* need to ask, in order for God to answer  
 Especially when trouble brews  
 Because it’s then that our hearts are probably the hardest and least prone to lean on him for *anything*, let alone answers
- Want to give you . . .
- 5 obstacles to prayer when trouble brews  
 5 things that prevent us from praying like we should, when trouble brews
1. Pride  
 I don’t know about you, but when I’m in the middle of a fight, it is not in my nature to stop and ask God for help  
 Is that a natural for you? If it is, you’re either extraordinary or lying  
 Because the norm for most of us is to handle it ourselves  
 Asking God for guidance when trouble brews is like asking for directions when you’ve already been lost for an hour – it’s hard on your pride  
 The longer you go, the harder it is – pride is an obstacle to prayer
  2. Distraction  
 Trouble in and of itself is distracting; Fights are distracting; Issues are distracting  
 The swirl of it all far too often diverts our attention fr the Lord, and keeps us fr praying  
 Have you ever been in difficult conversations where somebody all of a sudden says,  
 “Hey, let’s pray about it;” and you’re like, “Oh ya, why didn’t I think of that?”
  3. Unbelief  
 We often don’t pray, in good times or bad, because we don’t really believe in it  
 We don’t believe it does any good or has any effect  
 If we did, we’d pray more, far more; You practice what you believe

4. Guilt  
 “I haven’t prayed for so long, I just feel guilty going to God now”  
 You should; Now ask for forgiveness, get over it, and start praying
5. Laziness  
 Prayer is work – physically, emotionally, spiritually  
 And most people are loathe to do it, because they’re lazy

When trouble brews, check your prayers; Make an honest assessment of them  
 And get at it – don’t lack because you haven’t asked

*You do not have, because you do not ask; and . . .*

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*

When trouble brews, your problem may not be a lack of prayer, but selfish prayers  
 In which case you need to . . .

### **Check your motives (v3)**

Far too often, our first reaction when trouble brews . . .

Is to pray with a self-serving mindset; To put our own needs, desires, wants first  
 We’re not so much looking for a solution as we are relief

“God, so-and-so is such a pain in my neck; It sure would be great if . . .”

“They came down with laryngitis; Or got a job offer in another town”

“Or even left our church”

How often do we not receive because we ask wrongly – with the wrong motives

Instead of asking God to show us *our* faults in the situation . . .

Or asking him to help us find a solution that would *preserve* the relationship . . .

Or asking him for wisdom and insight into the other person’s life . . .

We just ask him to get us out of the trouble, so we don’t have to deal with it anymore

Consequently, we don’t receive because we ask with the wrong motives

- When Becky and I were first married, we had a rough time  
 We were both selfish, stubborn, and prideful (me more than her) – and she wanted out  
 We hadn’t even been married a year, and she was done  
 She liked me (sometimes), but she hated marriage  
 Meanwhile, in true male fashion, I thought things were great; I was oblivious  
 An indicator of our lack of communication, and *my* insensitivity

So knowing that divorce wasn’t an option, she used to pray in the first year that one of us would die, literally

It didn’t matter which one – she know both of us would go to heaven

She just wanted *out* of the marriage so she could get *out* of her misery

Not a good prayer, for sure

Instead of asking God to change our hearts, so we could have a God-honoring marriage

She asked God to *take* our lives so we wouldn’t *have* a marriage!

Fortunately, God didn’t answer it because it wasn’t a good motive – thank you Lord

Can you imagine what our lives would be like if God answered every single one of our prayers the way we wanted? We’d be a mess

When trouble brews, check the motives of your prayer

Because the purpose of prayer is not to get your will done in heaven, but God's will done on earth (Wiersbe; James)

### Check your **commitment** (v4-5)

Your commitment to God

James comes to a scathing conclusion in light of the infighting, wayward passions, lack of prayer, and selfish motives . . .

And says in v4 – *You adulterous people! Do you not know that . . .*

IOW, when we fight among ourselves, and let our passions/motives get the best of us . . .

We are basically adopting the ways of the world to solve our problems

When we do that, we make friends with the enemy, and enemies of our friends – first and foremost of whom, is God

Bible says that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength

Looking only unto him for our peace, security, purpose, satisfaction in life

Serving only him; Worshipping only him

When we look to others, or other means, to meet our needs . . .

James says we are basically setting God aside and becoming spiritual adulterers

We're breaking our promise of allegiance to God and God alone by adopting the ways of the world

- Unfortunately, this is not new

God's people have tended toward spiritual adultery since the beginning of time, starting with Adam and Eve's rebellion in the garden . . .

When they looked for satisfaction outside of God's plan

And continuing w/ the Israelites on various occasions throughout the OT

Like in Jer 2, when they set God aside in favor of their own way

It's a classic example of the spiritual adultery James is talking about, and speaks powerfully to us today

Turn there ([Jer 2:1-13](#)) and follow along as I read

Jer 2:3 – *the firstfruits of his harvest* – special, and set apart for his use

*All who ate of it . . .* – anyone who opposed/abused them, got punished

2:11 – *my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit*

They've exchanged their glory, beauty, splendor due to their relationship with me . . .

For something that doesn't do squat for them

2:13 – *they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters . . .*

They have rejected an all-satisfying, all-sufficient relationship with God . . .

In favor of doing things their own way

Ways that leave them empty like a broken cistern that can hold no water

We do the same thing, especially when trouble brews

We're prone to it – “prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love”

Prone to make an enemy of the one who loves us the most, and wants the best for our lives

Prone to break our commitment to him, in favor of lesser things

Prone to impatience and looking for ways outside of his design to solve our problems

When we do, it's spiritual adultery

- Just to make sure we get it

Just to make sure we get how much of an offense it is to reject God in favor of the ways of the world, trouble or not, he says . . .

5 – *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says . . .*

He's not referring to a specific quote when he refers to Scripture, but the overall theme of God's jealousy in the OT for the allegiance/commitment of his people

He's like – do you think that's a moot point; just a bunch of hot air? It's not

As with any love-based relationship . . .

God wants/expects our full allegiance; Our total commitment

He yearns jealously over the life he's given us

Just like a husband and wife are jealous/desirous of one another's fidelity . . .

God is passionate for yours

When that fidelity to him is broken by our unfaithfulness . . .

We not only risk his wrath/discipline, but we spurn his love and make him an enemy

Just the opposite of Abraham in James 2:23 where he was called a *friend* of God because of his faith and belief and commitment

- If there was ever a reason to stop your love affair with the things of this world, this is it

The God of the universe loves you so intensely, that he's jealous for your soul

He's jealous for your commitment/allegiance to him

So when trouble brews, check your commitment to God first

Because if that's right, chances are, your passions, prayers, and motives will be as well