

Humility and Prayer

James 4:1-12

Introduction

- Rip Tide
 - A current that pulls away from the shore, leading to a potential danger for swimmers who get caught in the current to drown
 - The current pulls swimmers away from the shore
 - Natural reaction is to swim against the current, but fatigue can easily set in and cause a drowning hazard
 - Contrary to natural response; swimmers should float with the current or swim parallel to the shore in an attempt to swim out of the current and return to shore.
 - Rip Tides are not easy to distinguish by looking at the ocean
 - Most swimmers don't know the danger until they are caught in the current and are fighting their way to safety
- The Book of James speaks to an undercurrent that pulls us away from God
 - The Book of James is one of the most practical books in the Bible
 - One of the major themes of this Book is
 - “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” (James 1:22; ESV)
 - “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17; ESV)
 - The author, James, is the brother of Jesus
 - And yet, at one time, not even James believed that Jesus was the true Messiah.
 - As we learned last week regarding the Apostle Paul, what authenticates a person's faith is the evidence of God's work in their life.
 - Ironically, it was the Reformation leader Martin Luther who opposed the Book of James
 - Luther took issue to a person's works being connected to their salvation
 - He had witnessed the abuses of the Catholic Church and felt so strongly about the confession of faith to authenticate a person's salvation above their works.
- What does the Book of James have to do with Rip Tides?
 - James speaks to an undercurrent that is impacting the faith community
 - The symptoms are obvious- there is fighting and quarreling within the church
 - These symptoms are not only harmful to the life of the church, but also to their witness to the surrounding community.
 - The problem with treating symptoms is that you often don't treat the real problem
 - The real problem is the undercurrent that is creating the symptoms
 - So what is the real problem?
 - James 4

- The passions and desires that reside within the heart
- The natural solution to the real problem would be; just don't do it
 - But that response is similar to trying to swim against a rip tide
 - In the end, just trying not to do it will wear you out
- Instead, as James will lay out, the most effective response is prayer
- Sermon Series *Seeking God*
 - The Promise: If you seek God, You will find God
 - Prayer should transform us
 - We shouldn't end a prayer where we began
 - In prayer, we come into the presence of God
 - In God's presence our faith is transformed
 - We expose ourselves to God's glory
 - We find confidence in God
 - As we work with God and God works with us- our lives are transformed
 - This truth is evident as we seek to identify the undercurrents that at times pull us away from God
 - If we are going to be serious about overcoming the undercurrents in our lives, we must humble ourselves and seek God through prayer.

Passions At War Within Us

- **James 4:1-3**
 - Feeding our Desires
 - How many of you woke up today and hit the snooze button on your alarm?
 - How many of you woke up to day hungry and ate breakfast to feed your hunger?
 - Already this morning you have literally fed your desires!
 - Sleep or eating breakfast are essential to our lives, so feeding these desires doesn't have negative consequences
 - BUT, what James describes is much more serious and yet something that all of us face in some form or another.
 - James identifies the undercurrent that is not only real for James' audience, but is real in all of our lives today
 - The passions and desires that reside deep within our heart
 - Or as James correctly states- Sin
 - Sin is not something we like to discuss in our culture
 - Instead of resisting temptation, our culture has found ways to feed our temptations, as if it is ok and only natural
 - To not give into temptation is to deprive ourselves of something human

- BUT then when those temptations get out of control we then have recovery groups or drugs to treat the symptoms of our real problem
- So while the Reformation leader Martin Luther did not approve of the Book of James due to message of works connected to faith, our culture resists James' message because it calls out the undercurrent that is pulling us away from God.
- James hits on a more appealing topic that we might connect better with
 - Vs 2c-3, "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."
 - The Promise of Prayer- If you seek God, You will find God
 - God desires to give graciously if we only ask
 - And yet one of the mistakes we make with prayer is that we petition God based on our personal desires rather than truly seeking God and His will.
- Every single one of us is dealing with an undercurrent in our life
 - Prayer is how we get to the real heart of our issue
 - Instead of fighting the current on our own, we've got to turn to God in prayer
 - Get real with the sin in your life- what pulls you away from God
 - Instead of just giving into it, we need to seek God to feed the desires in our heart.
 - Be aware of the war within you! Every single one of us is dealing with an undercurrent in our life!

Cheating God

- James 4:4-6
- Story of Dogs in the Morning
 - When Bentley was the only dog he got all the attention
 - Bentley got used to having all the attention to the point that he quit coming up on the couch with me in the early morning
 - I got kind of jealous because I liked having him curl up beside of me
 - Then we got Ralph. Ralph created competition for attention
 - Ralph had no problem jumping up on the couch which then left Bentley wondering where his place was
 - Bentley went from being inactive to new life
 - The race was on to see who could get on the couch first in the morning
 - Now, they both jump on the couch and claw for space
 - Settle to be on the couch usually laying on top of each other
- James uses the word "Adultery" to describe how our sin can separate us from God
 - That word may have personal meaning for some of you
 - I've never personally dealt with adultery, however I've talked to several who have
 - The effects of adultery are devastating

- This word is used throughout the Old Testament and New Testament to describe how God's people have rebelled against God
- God takes sin personally, in fact James says God becomes "jealous"
- Undercurrent
 - World vs. God
 - Passions and desires oppose God's will
- Prayer- Devotional Time with God
 - Time in the morning is the time I spend with God
 - While the dogs are fighting over position, the truth is all I really want is for both of them to jump up and sit with me
 - I'm not going to show favoritism, I just want to spend some quiet time with them and with God
 - Similar to God and his grace to spend time with us
- As we seek God we can become more aware of the war within us
 - The awareness is good, but it should also cause us to reflect on how we are cheating God
 - Something to consider: "*Are we giving more attention to the passions and desires in our life, or even influence of the world- rather than seeking God?*"
 - God has made us with a spirit that only functions properly when we seek Him
 - Through God's grace, God gives us the invitation to prayer- To know God and the Serve God
- Like a swimmer battling a rip tide, the undercurrent in your life may be pulling you under- turn to God in prayer.

The Practical Steps to Prayer

- **James 4:7-10**
 - Example of what not to do when caught in a rip tide
 - Natural response as a person is being pulled away from shore is to swim against the tide
 - The problem is that the strength of the tide will only wear out a swimmer creating a danger of drowning.
 - Much like swimmers are advised to respond to a rip tide in an alternative way, so James offers an alternative approach for dealing with sin
 - Submit to God
 - Resist the devil
 - Draw near to God
 - Repent
 - Humble yourself

- James approach is not simply to fight against the under current of sin, but instead to pray
 - When a swimmer gets caught in a rip tide they should swim parallel to the shore
 - By swimming parallel they have the opportunity to swim out of the rip tide and find calm seas in which they can then find their way back to the shore.
 - If we are going to overcome the undercurrent of sin in our life we've got to turn to God in prayer
- 5 Parts to Prayer
 - Submit to God- surrender, quit fighting the current or getting caught in the current, let it go
 - Double promise in prayer
 - Resist the devil- and he will flee from you
 - Draw near to God- and God will draw near to you
 - Repent
 - Humble yourself
 - Mourn and Gloom???
 - *Matthew 5:3-5*
 - *Blessed are the poor in spirit*
 - *Blessed are those who mourn*
 - *Blessed are the meek*
 - *Theirs is the kingdom of heaven!*
- We must get serious about the undercurrent in our life!

Conclusion

Story of Jesus asking his disciples to pray in the garden before the cross.

- *Luke 22*
- One of the darkest hours in Jesus' life as he prepared to go to the cross
- Submit to God's will
- Knew that the events that would follow would create confusion and fear for the disciples despite telling them everything that would happen
- Jesus asks his disciples to do the same thing he is doing to fight the undercurrent and that is to pray
- As Jesus is pouring his heart out- the disciples are so filled with fear that all they can do is sleep to deal with the temptation
- How tempting it is for us to do the same!

Review from Sermon Series *Seeking God*

- The Promise- if you seek God you will find God
- The Invitation- to know God and Serve God

- The Wisdom- more than a religious exercise, but offers substance for our lives

Prayer is practical but also powerful- I hope this sermon series has encouraged you to seek God more diligently in your life

All of us is dealing with some undercurrent in our life

- My undercurrent may be different from yours
- The influence of the world combined with our own passions and desires can pull us away from God
- Prayer is the practical but powerful tool we have to respond to the undercurrent in our life.