

## Pentecost 19; James 4:7-12

September 29-30, 2024

There's a lot of ways in life that we divide ourselves or separate ourselves into different groups. Maybe it's based on location. Are you a mid-westerner or are you a Southerner? Maybe it's based on which sports team you like best. Or maybe most prevalent, as we go further into this Fall, it is based on which political party you support.

Not only are we divided by the cultures we like, the athletic teams that we like, the ideals that we like or dislike, etc., but we are divided spiritually from our God. This division, this separation, when we look at it from a biblical perspective, we understand that separation has its root in sin. Sin is what divides people, divides us from God and us from one another. It divided brothers throughout history and Scripture. You see that it divides Cain and Abel. That had divided Joseph and his brothers, that it created separation between Jacob and Esau. We know it's that same sin that divides us from one another, that creates that separation and division between family members and friends and neighbors.

James, the author of our text, understood this wrestling that goes on in the hearts of believers. The James that wrote the words of our text is most likely the half-brother of Jesus. James writes almost nothing about basic Christian doctrines – he assumes that his readers already know of the saving acts of God on behalf of his people. Yet, he also knew the challenges that believers were facing in the years after Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension. He knew the persecutions that believers were facing all over that part of the world as he addresses this letter to: **“To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.”** But he also knew that the Devil would do whatever he could do to silence the message of Salvation. Therefore, James wants to encourage and challenge his readers, that even though the Devil was going to try to silence them, to let their faith become visible in how they treated other people. James is a practical book. If you believe the message of Jesus Christ, what will that look like in action? James understood what was at stake for Christians. He understood that as believers in Jesus we are at war with the Devil. The Devil wants to divide believers in Jesus from God and from each other. What divides us? Sin!

James does not want us to underestimate the power of Satan either. This enemy is seeking to destroy us. He would like nothing more for us to think that we can simply ignore him and he won't go after us. In fact, he is content for us to ignore him and underestimate him. James speaks about one of those tactics that he uses. **“Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another.”** If you think about it, it's a great tactic for him to use. Instead of being ready to fight the enemy who is outside the Christian Church, why not use people inside the church to fight one another? So, why do we do that sometimes? In a few verses before our text, James gives a reason why that might happen. He writes: **“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”** (James 4:1-3)

Watch what a small child does when he/she doesn't get their way. (It's probably a little more humorous when it's grandchild, right?) Yet, there are times that we might be like that 3 year old who didn't get their way. It's easy to do. There were times that as a young child, I knew what words to use to hurt my parents. At the time, I didn't really care. I was mad. I wanted to use words to hurt. Words are powerful and they can hurt. Remember what James said last week in our second lesson for an earlier chapter in the book? **“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”** (James 3:6)

There is another tactic that Satan uses in our text today. **“Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”** These words are often misused to say that we can't judge the words or actions of people. The Bible is full of all kinds of examples of people who speak against someone's words or actions to call them to repentance. Love does not tear down others; it builds them in Christ. If we speak against others and criticize them to ourselves look good, then we might be trying to take God's place as Lawgiver and Judge. Our words also need to demonstrate God's love. If our heart

is not in the right place, sinful judging is making us think that we are superior to another. It means that we are trying to make us the lord over the law.

So, how do we fight against these tactics of Satan? Not by ourselves. **“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”** As hurricane Helene hit the state of Florida this week, in some ways, there was little that they could do. People were warned. They could prepare for it to hit their property, but they couldn't stop it. So, James says that we need to hang on to God, who can stop the temptations of the Devil.

You have an enemy. Someone who wants to trip you up, tear you down, and make you fail. Someone that doesn't want you to reach the paradise of heaven. The attacks that the devil's schemes against us aren't always easy to observe and detect. Yet, we have a champion on our side. Jesus the Christ. He came and he overthrew the devil and resisted all of the devil's temptations. He lived a perfect life and God says he lived it for you. So, when the devil causes you to trip and stumble, causes you to sin, be of good cheer. Jesus has lived a perfect life for you and Jesus died the death that the devil really wanted you to die. He suffered in payment for all of your sins. Jesus has overcome the guilt of your sins is taken away. Your sins are forgiven. May God help all us to live these words of James. Amen.