

“DRAW CLOSER”**PASTOR MIKE CORWIN****TEXT: JAMES 3:13 – 4:3, 7-8a****GOD’S WORD: PSALM 1****I – CHOICES:**

When I was the Chief of Police it was my duty to insure that all the officers were working as they should and adhering to the standards we had set for all of our employees in the department. There were small infractions that for the most part were handled by the shift supervisors, but sometimes it was a major issue and made it to my desk to handle.

That’s when I would have what was commonly referred to as a “come to Jesus” talk. I would take the employee into the office and close the door. I would then explain to them the error of their ways and how it was unacceptable performance on their part. Most of those I spoke to saw the mistake for what it was and left the office promising that it would never happen again, and I dare say it usually didn’t. But there was always that one who had to argue. The one who refused to admit they were wrong and instead cast doubt upon the behavioral standards that I had set in place. When they finished it would seem like they were right and I was wrong.

When this happened I gave them a choice. I explained to them (sometimes not as calm as they would have liked) that their opinion had now been heard but would not change the standards. I explained to them that their 2 or 3 years of experience did not shed any new light on things the staff had been looking at and putting into place for a few years, all of them based on study and experience, not their worthless unexperienced personal opinion. I then gave them a choice. They could live by the standards I had endorsed as the Chief, or they could give me their badge and seek another department where the Chief may be more understanding. No one ever gave me their badge. They stayed employed.

II – CHOICES DRIVE OUTCOME:

As I looked at this week’s readings I saw this same theme. In our relationship with God we have choices and those choices drive the outcome of our relationship.

The Psalm you heard read this morning is a great example of this. The Psalm is almost like a beatitude. It offers us a choice between God's way and the wicked way. We can stand around and be associated with sinners and those who arrogantly mock God and resist his instruction, or we can delight in following God and his instructions, his standards.

We can live by the river of God and be well nourished and grow and mature in our faith or we can disregard God's Word and blow around in the wind.

God's way = blessing

Wicked way = downfall

Note that the Psalmist is not talking about two classes of people here. He's talking about two ways of living. The indication here is that we must walk in God's way and delight in his guidance, not just do what makes us feel good.

Pretty simple. Choose who you will follow. Your choice determines the consequences by which you will live. There are two different classes of people AFTER we make our choice. Those who will be with God, those who will end up being destroyed. Guess we need to make sure we choose wisely.

III – TEXT:

Then we get to this morning's text from the book of James. This passage too is about choice in our lives, in our faith.

JAMES 3:13 – 4:3, 7-8(a)

True Wisdom Comes from God

13 If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. 15 For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. 16 For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.

17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. 18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

Drawing Close to God

4 What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? 2 You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. 3 And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. 7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

This passage is a call to conversion. The first part is an indictment against the way we live and the last part tells us what our response should be. It gives us a choice, and a reminder that we must continually choose to live by the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of God.

Worlds = earthy, unspiritual, devilish & shows itself in many ways.

God's = pure peaceful, gentleness, willingness to yield and is full of mercy and good fruits.

These two ways are absolutely incompatible. You can see how vividly James points this out. You can look at these two comparisons and ask yourself – Which person am I? Am I living with worldly advice and influence, or am I living with God's guidance to please God and carry out his mission in the world. Which one are you? You can't be a friend of the world and a friend of God at the same time.

In his call to conversion James is speaking to those kind of people. He's addressing the double-minded Christian. Those who are trying to live by both kinds of wisdom at the same time. Worldly & Godly. He calls us to convert, to become single minded. To live for God, not the world. To live the way we know God wants us to live, not just the way that makes us feel good.

And he gives us two assurances for making such a choice:

If we resist the evil one he will flee from us. He will stop trying to rule our life because it will belong solely to God.

If we draw close to God he will draw close to you.

These two things will help us to live for God. The enemy out of the picture and God fully in it. You have to choose.

IV – WORLD:

As I look at this passage and I look at the world today I see that James was relevant then and he is still relevant today. Not since the civil war has this nation been so divided. We are at each other's throats over masks and vaccines. We see pure hatred between our political parties. Most of us have given up even talking about such things or politics because there is no way to do it without offending someone. No one else's opinion matters except our own.

During the last couple of years I have seen the double mindedness that James was talking about. I listened to some of your opinions, to some of your comments, and some of your Facebook posts were shared with me. People who I thought were pretty deep in their faith showed me that the world's wisdom could invade at the most opportune times. That it could overshadow your Christianity. As James said this resulted in quarrels and fights among some. It certainly did not model peacemaking, gentleness and humility James calls us to live. I invite you to go back and check such things.

I call you to be civil in all your discussions and interactions. Not everyone has to think like you. We may differ yet God made us all. I know that some of you are seething right now just because I pointed these things out, but you need to examine your hearts and your actions to see if you have made the right choice between the world and God. You have to do this in all categories of your life.

I would suggest that the biggest trouble with our society today is the lack of God as a priority. The arguments, the hatred, the shootings, the prejudice, the leadership problems, and the list could go on and on, but it comes down to the fact we put worldly things above God.

V – DRAW CLOSER:

The answer to all of this is given to us by James. Quit following the evil of the world and the devil will flee, and draw closer to God. Make him a priority again. Study his teachings, live according to his guidance, proclaim your faith to the world instead of letting the world proclaim it's version to you.

The way to do all this is to allow Jesus to enter your life, to be your Lord and Savior. Jesus told us in **John 14:6-7**:

6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. 7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"

Finding Jesus is finding God. Finding Jesus and allowing him in gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us in life.

The choice is yours. Draw closer to God and live the way he wants you to live or turn in your badge of Christianity and deal with the ultimate consequences. I pray you'll draw near.

AMEN