



**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

## **James Chapter 4 verses 1-12**

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times', these are the opening words of "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens. Referring to the two cities, Paris and London, during the tumultuous period of the French Revolution.

It could however be used to describe more recent events during the Covid-19 Pandemic. During lockdown we saw amazing changes for the better that really started to give me hope in humanity. People were helping others, doing shopping delivering food. We saw whole neighbourhoods turn out to clap for the NHS. We saw a greater appreciation for those who care for others. We even saw people praying for our prime minister when he was struck down by the disease. We would talk to people we met on the streets as we made room so that they could pass safely.

We have also seen, especially at the start of lockdown, demonstrations of pure selfishness with people bulk buying more than they actually needed and often more than they could ever need. As lockdown eases we see the return to old attitudes, complaining and moaning, people not taking the precautions necessary to prevent the spread of the disease and putting health of others at risk.

None of this should surprise us, R. C. Sproul said:  
*'We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.'*

The bible tells us that we do not become sinners we are born that way Psalm 51:5 says:  
**'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.'**

We the Church however are called to be different, yet as James writes to those first Christ believing Jews that were dispersed around the Mediterranean, this is not the case:

*'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.  
You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.'*

But is this any different from today? James could have been describing many churches that I have attended and more sadly he could be describing me.

I haven't actually killed anyone, but this is not what James meant. Jesus says in Matthew 5:21-22  
*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'  
But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.'*

So we need to ask:

Who amongst us have not been angry with our fellow brothers and sisters?

Who amongst us have not been jealous of a fellow brother or sister?

Who amongst us have not been offended by our fellow brothers and sisters?

Who amongst us have not held bitterness in our heart towards a fellow brother or sister?

Who amongst us have not spoken out against our fellow brothers and sisters?



I like the way KJV put Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 12 verse 10.

*'Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.'*

Do I really 'prefer' my brothers and sisters, putting their needs, happiness and feelings before my own?

James tells us in verses 5-6:

*'Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us ?*

*But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.*

Paul says in his letter to the Philippian church.

*'Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mind set as Christ Jesus.*

*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

This our true model to how we should live our lives. So as we start returning to our churches and gathering together once again, even if not yet, soon. It is time to make a fresh start, as we leave what many will call "The worst of times", let us enter what is called "The best of times" for our church as we show the world what it means to live for Christ, to:

*'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'*

So today:

*'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.*

*Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. 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 neighbour?*

**The most powerful sermon that you or I will ever preach will not be behind a pulpit or on a platform, but it will be the life that we live.**