

Sermon Summary | Sunday 22nd February 2026 | James 4.1-10

James 4.1-10 is a searching passage for Lent, not because Lent is about making ourselves miserable, but because it helps us become honest before God. James is not interested in surface-level religion. He wants wholeness: a life that matches our confession, and a heart that is not split in two. His central message is that pride makes us restless and broken, while grace makes us humble and whole.

James begins by calling us to face our inner warfare. He asks, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” His answer is uncomfortably personal: our conflicts outside often begin with conflict inside. The presenting problem may be an argument at home, in church, or in community life, but the deeper problem is desire. James is not saying all desire is wrong. Rather, he is exposing desires that have become demands. What begins as “I would like this” becomes “I must have this.” Once that happens, we become restless, because we are asking created things to give us what only God can give: security, identity, comfort, or control. Other people then become obstacles if they block what we demand or fail to supply it.

This also reshapes how we think about prayer. Sometimes we do not have because we do not ask: prayerlessness reveals functional independence. At other times, we ask and do not receive because we ask wrongly, treating God as a means to fund our plans rather than as the Father with whom we have communion. James invites us to name the desires driving our frustration and to bring them into the light.

Second, James tells us to drop our double life. His language is shocking: “You adulterous people!” This is not petty insult, but covenant language. To try to belong to Jesus and the world at the same time is not a small compromise; it is a broken vow. By “the world,” James does not mean our neighbours, society, or ordinary enjoyment. He means a value system set against God: self at the centre, image over integrity, comfort over holiness, and God treated as optional. Divided loyalty cannot produce spiritual health.

Yet at precisely this point, James gives one of the most beautiful promises in the letter: “But he gives more grace.” God’s jealousy is not insecurity, but covenant love. He will not share his people with idols because idols destroy them. And in Jesus Christ, the faithful Bridegroom does not abandon his adulterous people. He comes for them. At the cross, Jesus bears our divided loves, our double-mindedness, and our friendship with the world. So when James calls us to draw near to God, he is not telling us to climb our way back by moral effort. He is calling us home on the basis of grace already given in Christ.

Third, James shows us how to come back the humble way. Repentance is not vague regret or general spirituality. It is concrete. James gives a pathway of return: submit to God, resist the devil, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, mourn over sin, and humble yourself before the Lord. This is not a call to fake gloom, but to honest sorrow over what nailed Jesus to the cross. True repentance touches both hands and heart — what we do and what we love.

The promise is astonishing: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” God does not say, “Clean yourself up, and then I may tolerate you.” In Christ, God has already moved towards us. Jesus is God with us, the cross is God for us, and the resurrection is the open door home.

James is not trying to shame us into change. He is shepherding us into wholeness. Our quarrels and restlessness are often the sound of a divided heart. But the good news is that God gives more grace — more than our prayerlessness, compromises, and divided loves. So we need not stay split, distant, or defensive. We can submit, resist, draw near, and trust the promise: “He will lift you up.”

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where are my desires in danger of becoming demands — things I feel I must have in order to be secure, comfortable, in control, or at peace?
2. Where is God calling me to humble repentance: to submit to him, resist the devil, draw near to him, and trust that he gives more grace?