

James 4:4-5

There are certain words which we instinctively connect either to everything that is good and right, or to everything that is wrong and wicked. Hatred, envy, murder, and adultery are words which we immediately connect to all that is wrong and sinful. But words such as love, gentleness, patience, and honor we right away place into the category of good and virtuous. What about the word "jealousy?" Where would you put that word? With all things good and noble or with those things which are evil and sinful? Our first thought would be to place the word jealousy with other bad words. It's not a word that we think fondly of. If someone says, "You're jealous," it's said as an insult. Looking up the word in the dictionary we're told that jealousy means to be suspicious, distrustful, envious, and resentful. These descriptions do not call to mind such things as are good, pure, and honorable. Yet there is one more definition of jealousy which we need to consider. To be jealous, Webster says, is to "demand exclusive devotion...to be intolerant of rivalry."

Using this definition, can it not be said that in a healthy marriage both the husband and the wife are jealous of each other? Are husbands not intolerant of rivals within their marriage? Are not wives entitled to demand that their husbands are devoted exclusively to them? In fact, marriage stands upon this foundation. "Forsaking all others," husbands and wives are asked, "Will you be exclusively his or hers as long as you live?" It's not wrong for husbands and wives to be jealous of each other. Not suspicious or distrustful. Not envious or resentful, but expecting their spouse to be loyal and devoted exclusively to them.

And God agrees with this. In fact, jealousy in our marriages is patterned after His jealousy of us. "I the Lord your God," He says, "Am a jealous God." He said these words in Exodus 20 at Mt. Sinai, and He repeats them through the Apostle James: "He yearns jealously," our text says, "Over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us." Friend, you have a jealous God...but that's good. For if God were not jealous of you He wouldn't care if you spent all eternity with Him in heaven or with Satan in hell. But He does care because He is jealous over you. Like a husband who loves his wife and wants to be with her, your God greatly desires to shower you with blessings of love in this life and to be with you forever in the life to come.

Now there is something that we need to know. God is not the only one who is jealous over you. The world is too. And so James in our text warns us about this world's desire for you by echoing the words of Jesus: "You cannot serve two masters; you cannot serve God and mammon." "Friendship with the world," as James puts it, "Is hostility toward God." You and I cannot be friends with both the world and with God for they are opposed to each other. Now by the "world," James does not mean the beauty of nature--the creation which God gave to mankind to subdue and enjoy. James is referring to the sinful world--the forces in our world which work against the Spirit of God. When James says that we cannot be friends with the world, he does not mean that we cannot enjoy a hiking trip in the Rocky Mountains or relax on a sandy beach, take in a beautiful sunset or surround ourselves with furry friends.

By the sinful world which opposes God and is jealous for you, our text is speaking of the nightly parade of television shows which mock the Christian Faith and hold nothing sacred; which trample the name of God by their constant misuse of it. The sinful world which opposes God is seen in the daily slaughter of unborn babies under the guise of women's rights. The sinful world which is jealous for you is seen in the promoting of homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle, rather than being sinful and perverted.

When this world promotes sinful behavior and ridicules God's commandments and mocks the truth of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, James says that if we become friends of this then we are enemies of God. We cannot hold to right and wrong at the same time. We cannot love both truth and falsehood. We cannot serve God and mammon. We cannot be friends with both God and the world.

The world seeks its own selfish way. God came to our world to seek the way of suffering and the cross. The world finds delight in the pursuit of riches. God became poor for your sake. The sinful world is a pawn of the devil. God came to destroy the works of Satan. And both God and the world are jealous over you. The world wants you and your children and your grandchildren. It wants to train you to think, speak, and act like it does. The world wants to occupy your time with so many things that you have no time for the Lord. The world despises Christ and His cross. It knows nothing of God's mercy and grace. It teaches, "Forgive only if it benefits you." It says, "Grab all you can out of life." It makes a mockery of God's design for marriage and family. It eulogizes those who die apart from Christ. It wants no mention of Jesus at a funeral. It wants to hear no talk about sin; nothing of the Gospel of Christ. The world is opposed to God and is jealous for you.

Before a young woman is married she may rather enjoy being pursued by several different suitors at the same time. These young men will do all that they can to win her affections, trying to outdo the other, and they will not care much for each other in the process. If you have ever seen glimpses of the reality television shows where a bachelorette is the prize, you know how jealous the young men are over her. But once she is married, all others must bow out. Now her husband has the right to be jealous, as she does of him.

Friends and fellow sinners, is it not true that, although Christ is our Divine Husband, we often act like we're still single and playing the field? God rightly desires us, but day after day we will ignore Him and His Word and spend our time with this sinful world which is still pursuing us. The world tempts us not with flowers and candy, but with its evil lusts and its promise of riches and greatness, and so often we turn our back on our God to whom we are already married by virtue of our baptism into Christ, and have a fling, an affair, a sinful liaison with the world which is always jealous of us.

Our text begins with these words, "You adulterous people!" And this is true of us. But hear this good news--your true Husband does not, as a result, abandon you. He does not give up on you and reject you. God remains jealous over you even though you and I often show more affection toward the world than toward Him. He gave you His Spirit in your baptism and He jealously, out of love, desires to keep His Spirit within you until He takes you home to be with Him forever. Friend, He does not stop forgiving you. We heard the children sing today, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." He loves you and He forgives you. And not one of us deserves this. We deserve to be a rejected wife. We deserve to perish along with this dying world.

But your God is jealous for you. The world cannot have you. Satan cannot have you. Death cannot keep you forever. Because of God's jealousy He died on a cross and was punished for your sins. Because of God's jealousy, He who rose again drew you to Himself as His bride in Holy Baptism, and He draws you to His meal of grace to keep you joined with Him. Because your God is jealous, even though the world still tempts you and so often we are lured away, God keeps calling you back to Himself through His Word of Repentance and He always forgives you for Jesus' sake. He wants no rivals when it comes to you. He wants you to be devoted to Him because no matter what; no matter how you have lived and what you have done, your Lord and Savior is exclusively devoted to you. Amen.