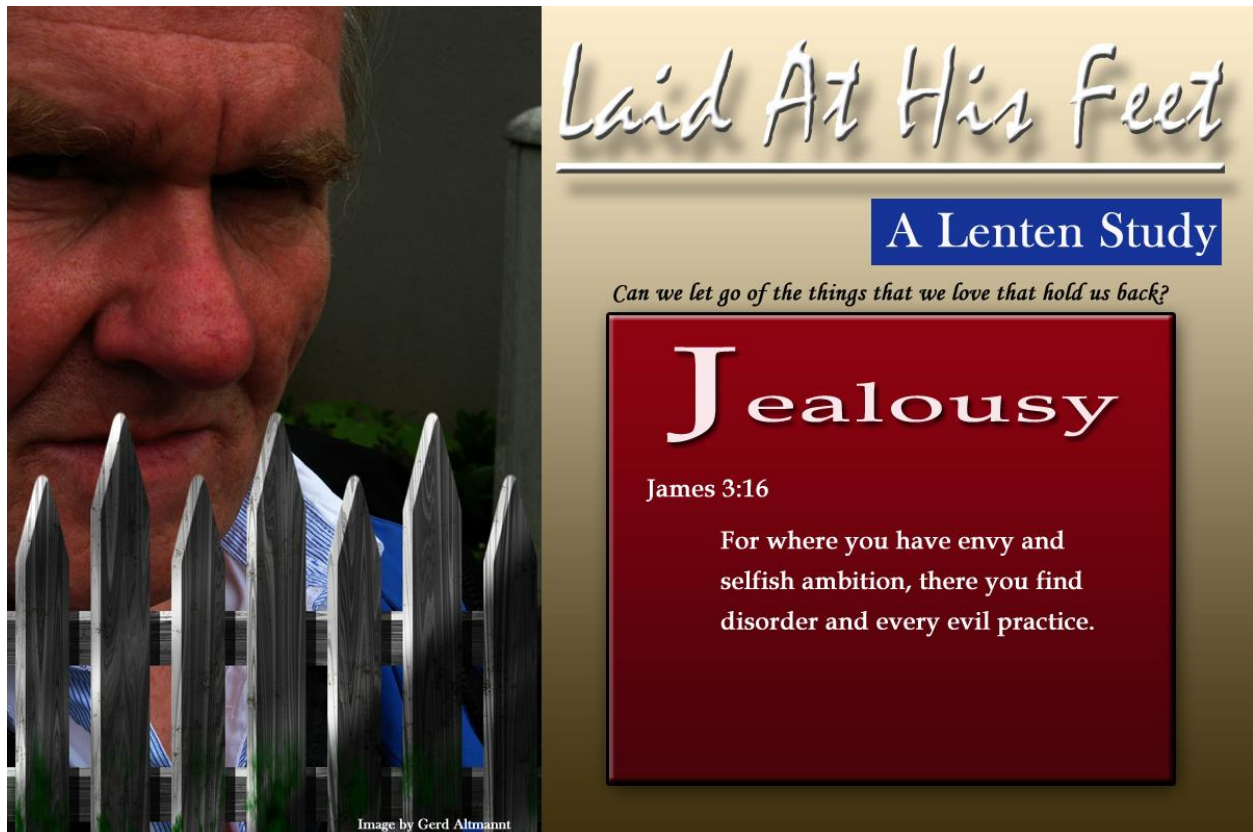


March 13, 2022 – Jealousy

James 3:16

16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.



Laid At His Feet

A Lenten Study

Can we let go of the things that we love that hold us back?

Jealousy

James 3:16

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Image by Cerd Altmann

Special Music:

“How He Loves” David Crowder Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUKJEhkk2G8>

SPLIT PATH

Jason liked Sylvia, the new apprentice that had been assigned to him. She was smart and chock-full of great ideas. Punctuality was her strong suit, and she never missed a deadline, even if it meant she had to stay late. She didn't know a great deal about Jason's work but was eager to learn graphics design under his tutelage. Sylvia read the books and manuals Jason gave her and practiced constantly to improve her skills under Jason's watchful eyes.

In truth, there just wasn't anything to not like about Sylvia. She was personable and always willing to be a team player. Jason knew that she would go far in the company, and it was great to have her around.

Jason's workload had become overbearing in the last few years. Besides writing code, designing applications, recommending software, and maintaining the computers, Jason was also responsible for all the graphics, both in-house and on the internet. So, he was thrilled to have some help. And Sylvia soon became competent enough that she was able to take over most of the graphic content under Jason's supervision. Jason was able to spend more time on application design and coding.

The day came when Jason's boss asked to meet with him to check on how things were going. At the appointed time, he knocked on Dianna's door and she told him to come on in. He casually sat down in a chair across from Dianna's desk. Jason had been with the firm for over ten years and he and Dianna worked well together. With the addition of Sylvia to help him, he was more confident in meeting his work objectives and less stressed than he had been in the last couple of years.

Dianna asked him how his day was going and how Sylvia was working out. Jason couldn't help but sing Sylvia's praises and thank Dianna for bringing her in to help him with his workload.

Dianna sat up straight, shook her head, took a deep breath, and smiled. It was not the smile of happiness or gratitude. It was an obviously forced smile. One that says, “that’s not really why I called you in.” Jason felt his stomach drop. There was a new tension in the air and Jason knew that what he was about to be told was not good news.

Dianna looked at Jason and could see the apprehension in his eyes. This was not going to be easy. Jason had a new son at home and his wife’s father was in hospice care. But business is business.

“Jason, you have done really great work for us,” Dianna said, “As a matter of fact, your work has been excellent, and you have seen this company through some really hard times. We appreciate it.”

“Dianna, are you firing me?” Jason asked.

“Don’t think of it that way, Jason. We’re a growing company and we are making a lot of changes right now. Upper management has decided that we need to split your work up into three separate departments with multiple staff. We have decided to outsource the application development. We will still have some in-house coders, but we are moving to a new platform that you are not trained in. All the computer maintenance will be handled by people in the IT department.”

“Well, I guess that means I will just need to focus on graphics,” stammered Jason, hoping to salvage his career.

“See, that’s the thing Jason, you make too much money to be our graphics guy. It was great that you could do that on top of all of the other stuff that you were doing, but things have changed. You see, Sylvia’s not your apprentice. She’s your replacement. We no longer have a place for you. You will need to clean your desk of personal items. A box has been placed on your desk to carry them. Your computer access has already been removed. As soon as you have packed up, security will show you out. We’ve granted you two weeks severance pay and your insurance will be good until the end of the month. It’s been a

pleasure working with, Jason, and I wish you the greatest of success in your career. Do not hesitate to reach out to me if you need a reference.”

With that, Dianna moved to the door to let Jason out of the office and then closed it behind him. Jason was dumbstruck. He had been training his own replacement and didn't even know it. He went to his desk and packed up his things without talking with anyone. Stan from Security was standing by his desk. Sylvia wasn't around. When he was finished, Stan asked for his keys and security card, then walked him out of the building.

In a way, he was jealous of Sylvia. She was less educated, less trained, less experienced. But she had a job, and he did not. Right now, he would give anything to be in Sylvia's shoes.

Bitterness crept in. Anger engaged. Envy and jealousy took root. The path before Jason split into two possible choices. One was a dark path of anger, angst, and revenge resulting in damage to his soul. The other a narrower path of mercy, grace, and forgiveness resulting in a cleansing of his soul. His humanity begged him down the wider, darker path and God beckoned him to the path of grace. It was only then that he stopped and knelt on the asphalt in the parking lot... and prayed.

Jealousy is a funny thing. It is defined as the fear that one can be replaced, like an interchangeable part, lacking real value. Jealousy occurs when fear lets us believe that someone is about to take our job, take our partner, take our spouse, monopolize our friends. The monster of jealousy can easily get out of hand if we sense someone wants our job, wants our spouse, takes our time away from our friend's, or takes our glory. We ask ourselves, "What makes them better than us that they can replace us? What do they have that we don't? Money, power, good-looks, the right friends, more charisma, experience, education, opportunity?"

When we get replaced, we feel our power drain away. We feel cast aside. We feel pain. We start questioning our worthiness, especially if the person or thing that replaces us is less experienced or doesn't have our beauty or swagger. We do not want to be diminished. And yes, there are times when we can be replaced by machines. And yes, we can be jealous of those machines. From the dawn of humankind, no one has even wanted to be replaced. When we experience the possibility of losing our place, our status, our relationships, our jobs, jealousy rises to the surface and suggests to us that we should do anything within our power to prevent that from happening.

The difference between envy and jealousy boils down to semantics. Envy is when someone else has what we want. Jealousy is when we have something that we fear someone will take from us. Both are legitimate fears that can lead to paranoia and fear. In an example: David was not jealous of Uriah, but envious of him because he was Bathsheba's husband. David wanted what Uriah had. Uriah,

on the other hand, was jealous of David because David was replacing him as Bathsheba's mate. Uriah did a much better job of handling his jealousy than David did handling his envy.

There is a very basic element that is common between envy and jealousy. Both situations are ego driven. In both cases we try to feed our own hunger, no matter how it affects others. Everyone around us becomes collateral damage.

Can you remember a time when your spouse got extremely moody and argumentative over the most trivial of things and you just couldn't figure out why? It made no sense, and it was totally unlike them? You only knew that your spouse's attitude hurt your feelings at the time. You tried to talk to your spouse about it but they just didn't have any interest in discussing it. Then several days later you learned that your spouse didn't get the promotion they were expecting, or they had lost a big account, or maybe a project that they were responsible for had gone horribly wrong? Maybe a major appliance had broken and they didn't want to let you know because it would be expensive to replace it? When you found out, you began a process of understanding that you were just collateral damage. Knowing this doesn't necessarily make you feel better, but at least you are able to comprehend and could adjust your attitude to one of compassion rather than feeling victimized. When we love someone, we want to try and ease the pain. We truly want to understand. We want to make things better. We want to share the burden.

Jealousy and envy leave us feeling marginalized with a focus on ourselves. When that jealousy and envy are left unresolved, we continue to focus on our

own issues rather than the cause. When we decide that the only solution to the dilemma is to feed that personal craving, we find ourselves engaged in a battle of wills with God. Again, think of David's struggles over Bathsheba and Uriah. David chose a path of destruction to satisfy his envy and it cost him dearly in his relationship to God and to his people. He even went so far as to have Uriah killed just to meet his own selfish desires.

James wants us to understand how these emotions affect our walk with God and each other.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James is telling us that when we allow our emotions of envy, jealousy, and selfishness to take control of our lives, we are literally giving our souls over to chaos and allowing evil to redefine our path without ever letting God be involved in those decisions. We know in our heart that our Creator is not happy with our choices. Something inside us tells us that the itch of Jealousy and Envy will not go away unless we scratch it. And if we do our own scratching, God will never know. If we believe and understand that God has the hairs on our head numbered, do we really think he doesn't know when we are dealing with jealousy and envy? Do we really think that God does not notice when we misjudge the actions of our spouse and get jealous, or see our envy over our neighbor's new bass boat? God knows us far better than we know ourselves. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and when we allow these emotions to bring us pain, the Holy Spirit experiences that pain as well.

God does not reveal His Divine presence in envy, jealousy, or selfishness. These are human emotions driven by our own selfishness. As Christians, we often talk about letting go and allowing God to be in control of our lives. And yet, when we hit a speed bump of jealousy or envy, our first reaction is to reach over and grab the wheel. It's like we are saying, "Yes, God, I know you are the better driver and I give you complete control, but I don't want you to forget that it's still my car." The idea expressed here is that instead of giving our lives to Christ, we are simply loaning our lives to him. We can take them back at any time. If, at any time, we feel that our Creator is not doing a good job controlling our lives, or, if we decide we would rather take a much more scenic route, we will just take back control. That it is our prerogative to change our mind. We discover the hard way that we were never fully committed to begin with.

Commitment can be agonizing. Commitment can take a great deal of energy and will power. Think about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and focus on his prayer to his Father.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

He prayed this prayer three times. Do you think He forgot where this was all leading? Do you believe that He just suddenly realized the actual cost involved? Do you think that Jesus believed His Father wasn't listening and he had to repeat himself? Why does He repeat Himself three times? I want you to think hard about this next question, "Do you think that Jesus was uncommitted, that He was looking for a way out?"

Please note, Jesus did not grab the wheel and take control. The Bible tells us that He could have called ten thousand angels at any time to rescue Him. He started and ended His ministry the same way. He could have turned the stones to bread and eaten after having fasted for forty days. He could have taken satan up on his offer to control the world. He could have tested God by jumping off the temple heights. But He didn't. He did not take control even though there was nothing to prevent him from doing so.

God doesn't get angry with Him when we ask questions like "Are you sure this is the right direction? Looks pretty murky out there. I'm getting a little scared, Lord. Are you sure you know what you are doing?" No, God is extremely patient with us even when we act like a small child and ask the same questions over, and over, and over again. The problem occurs when those questions turn to actions, when we reach our own conclusions, when we decide that God does not know what He is doing, and we grab the wheel out of His hands.

"I love my jealousy, God, and it is my jealousy to do what I want with it. I love my envy, God, and I am not letting go of it for you or anyone else. I will let you control most of the things in my life, but these are mine and you can't have them."

Envy and jealousy are part of our core. And to be perfectly honest, they are a very ugly part of our core. Envy rises out of our pride. Jealousy rises out of our pain. Both are equally damaging to our relationship with God.

Our human hearts can justify the kind of ugliness that is created out of these uncontrolled emotions by putting the blame elsewhere. “My spouse should not have done that to make me jealous. My neighbor should not have bought that bass boat to make me envious. It’s really their fault.” This kind of self-validation of emotion can lead us down a dark path. There is a fine line between envy/jealousy and abuse. Left unchecked, it is these emotions that can lead us to do horrific things. It led David, a man after God’s own heart, to kill Uriah. When Bathsheba became pregnant with David’s son, it was only a matter of time before everyone knew what had been going on. Instead of turning to God and admitting his sin and his problem, David took matters into his own hands and compounded the problem. Lust led to envy, envy to adultery, adultery to shame, and shame to murder. At no point in that process did David admit that things were out of control. At no point did he bring the matter to God. At each step, he self-validated his actions.

In our story today, Jason stopped and took time to pray before his emotions escalated into something he would regret. There is no question that he had been wronged. He could have automatically chosen that darker path and taken that pain home to his wife and new-born baby. But by stopping to pray, he allowed God control to help him deal with the overwhelming emotions. Jesus did the very same thing in the Garden of Gethsemane. David, however, chose not to involve God and everyone around him paid a huge price for his sin.

In this series of messages, we are discussing things that we need release into God’s hands; things that we often keep our fist around and refuse to let go

of. Jealousy and envy are in that group, blemishes and scars on our soul that we think we need to keep control of to keep from losing who we are. Our commitment to Christ is not about the things that we readily admit are out of our hands. It's about the things that we falsely believe we have in our control. "What are you talking about, preacher? I can control my envy! I can control my jealousy!" Words spoken by every human on the planet at some time.

I tell you, if we could truly control our sinful natures, there would have been no reason for Jesus to come and teach us otherwise. We are born sinful. We will die sinful. Our only salvation is through the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Paul says in 1 Timothy: **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst."** Paul recognized this in himself. We would do well to search our souls and recognize this in ourselves as well.

This week, let us search our souls for those pockets of sin that we have yet to turn over to God. Those pockets keep us from being complete in Christ. They are a sign of stubbornness on our parts. We all have them. We all struggle with them. Let us acknowledge them for what they are and lay them at the foot of Jesus and give him control.

God bless you all

AMEN

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