

# WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

## Life Application Sunday School Class

### Psalm 10

May 5, 2002

We have been all studying the book of James. Because of the combined class today, I have chosen to take a small digression from that study, but certainly one that is related to a passage in chapter 4. Our class just completed chapter 4 in James, and one related passage that we looked at last week was Psalm 10. Today we are going to take a closer look at Psalm 10, which provides a graphic description of the wicked person full of pride. Before we get into Psalm 10, I would like to take a brief overview of James 4 to set the stage. If you would turn there, I will reference several of the verses as we review.

Throughout James, one of the sinful heart attitudes that he targets and exposes is pride and arrogance. As we go through chapter 4, note that all of the sinful behavior addressed has its root in pride and arrogance. The chapter starts by exposing the source of quarreling and conflict, the selfish desires of the human heart:

READ James 4:1-3

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*

James states that selfish desires lead to selfish actions – even fighting and killing. It is so true that the desires of the sinful heart, when left unchecked and uncontrolled, lead to some ugly situations. James further states that in our self-sufficiency and pride, we scheme, manipulate, and fight for what we want instead of asking God. And even when we do ask, we don't receive because we haven't asked from a right motive. This coveting to satisfy our heart desires is characterized in verses 4-5 as spiritual adultery.

READ James 4:4-5

*<sup>4</sup> You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?*

When we allow the desires of our hearts to rule us, and we will do anything to satisfy them, these desires become idols. They are what we are worshiping. This is the way of the world, to scheme and to manipulate to get what they want, with little or no regard for who is hurt in the process.

In verses 6-10, James gives us the solution for this terrible dilemma. It is the grace of God that leads us to humility, mourning, and repentance.

James 4:6-10

*<sup>6</sup> But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

James says that if we detect any of these idolatrous tendencies, that we need to humble ourselves before God, and weep, and mourn, and lament our wickedness. And God promises that if we do, He will purify and cleanse us and draw near to us. This change only comes to us by the grace of God. We can't merit or earn it, it has to be granted. And God promises to give us this change of heart if we draw near to Him.

James goes on in verse 11 and 12 and exposes another manifestation of a proud and boastful heart, a tongue full of slander and criticism.

### James 4:11-12

*11 Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. <sup>12</sup> There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?*

When we find ourselves always seeing the faults and weaknesses in everyone else, then that is evidence of a proud heart. This passage tells us when we slander and criticize others, that we have usurped the position of judge and exalted ourselves above God's law. Speaking against one another is a serious offence in the eyes of the Lord. Again, we need the mercy and grace of God to break and humble us, and the goodness of God to lead us to repentance. A right relationship with God always manifests in love and mercy towards others.

Finally, last week, our class looked at another manifestation of pride – self-sufficiency and boasting. This perhaps is one of the greatest sins in the United States today – the idea that we are strong and mighty, can do anything if we put our minds to it, that we are invincible, and can determine our own destiny. The scriptures teach that God hates such an attitude of independence and self-reliance.

### James 4:13-17

*13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." <sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

In the course of studying this passage, we briefly looked at Psalm 10. Psalm 10 contains a detailed profile of an evil, proud heart. Turn to Psalm 10, and let's read it together:

### Psalm 10

*Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? <sup>2</sup> In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. <sup>3</sup> He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. <sup>4</sup> In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. <sup>5</sup> His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. <sup>6</sup> He says to himself, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble." <sup>7</sup> His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his*

*tongue. <sup>8</sup> He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims. <sup>9</sup> He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless;*

*he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net. <sup>10</sup> His victims are crushed, they collapse;*

*they fall under his strength. <sup>11</sup> He says to himself, "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees."<sup>12</sup>*

*Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. <sup>13</sup> Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"?*

*<sup>14</sup> But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim*

*commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. <sup>15</sup> Break the arm of the wicked*

*and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. <sup>16</sup> The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. <sup>17</sup> You hear, O LORD,*

*the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, <sup>18</sup> defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more.*

This Psalm is a lament and plea to the Lord for justice. It begins in a state of despair, and ends with a great affirmation that God will hear and avenge the righteous, and true justice will be served. This is the overall message of Psalm 10. But today, we are going to look specifically at the first eleven verses, which is a vivid description of the wicked. From that description, we are also be able to paint a picture of a righteous person's heart and actions. Then we will ask some questions to help apply this lesson to our lives.

In verse 1, the psalmist starts almost in a state of despair. Based on what he sees, he cries out, without understanding, "*Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*"

Can you identify with what this Psalmist is feeling and expressing? Are there ever times that God seems to be somewhere else, especially when we are facing trouble or difficulty? Have there been times that you have felt helpless and overwhelmed with trouble and evil about you, and the Lord is hiding? What is it that causes us to feel forsaken by God? I think we can find some answers to that question in this Psalm. What is it the psalmist was seeing and thinking that brought him to this place of agony and grief?

He was looking at his circumstances, specifically the actions and attitudes of the wicked that are flaunted about and go seemingly unchallenged by the Almighty. When we get our eyes off of the Lord as He has revealed Himself in His word, and start to focus on our circumstances and the temporal injustices of this life, it can lead to despair. This lament changed into a voice of hope as the Psalmist considered God.

Verses 2 through 11 give us an apt description of the wicked that caused such grief in the Psalmist. Note that these verses do not just describe a wicked man's actions, but also his heart:

Listen to verses 2-3: *In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. <sup>3</sup> He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.*

Verse 2 says the wicked man has an arrogant heart, which causes him to devise traps and schemes to take advantage of the weak. Not only does he carry out his scheme, but in his arrogance, he boasts about how he has been able through his craftiness to take advantage of others and satisfy his selfish heart. Not only does he do these things, but he gives his hearty approval to others that do the same.

What is his attitude toward God? He reviles God. The Hebrew root of this word revile is to blossom, or show forth. It carries the idea of an "in your face" attitude. It's not just that this person is greedy and selfish and takes advantage of others, he flaunts and brags of his evil, and takes pleasure in those who do the same.

Verse 4 goes on to state that "*In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.* In all of his thinking, there is no room for God. The wicked man is characterized by self-reliance, and sees no need for God. This is a picture of the unregenerate heart. He feels he has the world by the tail, and nothing can stop him. He is outwardly rich, successful, healthy, and he has no fear of others or of God. He is

confident, self-assured, taking care of number one, and lives as if this is the way it will always be. He doesn't just ignore the poor; he despises the weak and those who are not able to defend themselves.

Listen to verses 5 and 6 ".<sup>5</sup> *His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies.* <sup>6</sup> *He says to himself, "Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble."* He seems to need nothing, he is lifted up in his success, he has no regard for God's law, and he sneers and puffs at those who oppose him. He is self confident and feels unshakable.

Verse 7 says what characterizes his speech "<sup>7</sup> *His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue.*" A wicked person uses his tongue to oppress, threaten, malign, and deceive others to meet his own purposes. His tongue becomes a tool he uses to carry out the wickedness in his heart.

In verses 8 through 10, the wicked person deceitfully lies in wait to take advantage of the helpless. He sets snares and traps for them. Listen to verses 8 through 10 . <sup>8</sup> *He lies in wait near the villages; from ambush he murders the innocent, watching in secret for his victims.* <sup>9</sup> *He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.* <sup>10</sup> *His victims are crushed, they collapse; they fall under his strength."*

And finally, in verse 11, he thinks to himself "*God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees.*" He makes a terrible mistake. Because he is not immediately judged, and seems to be successful in his schemes, he fails to perceive and know that one day he will be called into account and pay for his wickedness and sin. This remainder of this Psalm finishes with a plea from the Psalmist for justice and an affirmation that God will make all things right and call the wicked into account for their evil. He finishes with great confidence that God will rescue the helpless and answer his call for justice.

So what can we gain from this description of the wicked heart? First, we must affirm that this is a picture of our heart apart from the grace and mercy of God. Within every son of Adam dwells the potential for such wickedness. Apart from the grace of God in our lives, this would be a description of us. Second, as those who have been saved, and have a new heart, we can understand what a righteous life looks like by considering the antithesis of this description.

The righteous man does not take advantage of the weak or defenseless, but rather comes to their aid. In his humility, he looks for opportunity to serve those around him and help the helpless. He brings no glory to himself, but rather directs all praise for his actions to God. He despises the selfish desires of his heart, and when he sees greed in himself or others it produces great sorrow. He cherishes the Lord, and calls on Him continuously and seeks His face. He does not lean to His own understanding or trust his own thoughts, but seeks the mind and thoughts of the Lord to direct His paths. When prosperity comes his way, he is thankful, and humbled, realizing that blessings ultimately come from the hand of a sovereign God. He loves his enemies and those who oppose him, and returns blessing for cursing, realizing that God is also longsuffering and good even to those who hate Him. He has no confidence in himself, but relies daily on the grace of God to uphold him and keep him safe. He realizes that he is frail, and that apart from God's protection and strength, he would easily be shaken and fall. He realizes that much trouble is all around, and he takes a sober view of the dangers that could easily ensnare him. He knows that He needs the protection and help of the Lord to stand strong. He defends the innocent and the helpless, and helps those who have been abused and downtrodden by life and evil men. The righteous man lives every day realizing that he will face God as the supreme Judge, and that God knows and sees all and is no respecter of persons.

What we have looked at in Psalm 10 is the same issue raised by James in chapter 4. Boasting and self-direction and self-sufficiency are manifestations of an evil and proud heart. We need to recognize our utter dependence of God, and submit all of our thoughts and plans to His direction and control.

In conclusion, for reflection and application of the lesson, I would like us to consider and discuss some questions:

1. What are some practical steps that we can take to demonstrate our reliance and dependence upon God?
2. How will a proper view of ourselves and our abilities be reflected in our prayer life? Our church life? Our jobs? Our life at home?
3. What are some tangible ways that we can get involved in taking care of weak and helpless people?
4. What are some practical ways that we can make room in our thoughts for God?