

Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

[Changing Lives](#) - James 3:13-4:3

I am an avid watcher of animal and nature shows particularly when they are teaching about the characteristics or habits of animals. It was one such show that captivated my attention when it talked about capturing monkeys.

Early trappers for zoos found monkey difficult to catch. Throwing nets over them proved difficult because of their escape to the trees. Other methods proved useful for a short time but the monkeys seemed to figure traps out or they learned to avoid them. But some early trappers had the foresight to ask help of the native people.

It was in asking that they learned there was a very easy way of trapping monkeys that worked every time. Cut a hole in the side of a gourd, then place a piece of fruit inside a gourd exactly the size of the hole.

When the monkey reaches through and gets his hands on the fruit, he will not let go. Even when the gourd is collected by hand by the trapper, the monkey will not let go of the fruit.

I bring that up because this morning's scripture reminds me that sometimes I am no smarter than the monkey. Sometimes I get my hands on something and even though it might keep me from a relationship with God, I want to hold on to it anyway. And too often in the pastoral ministry I have watched other persons be dragged away from their relationship with God by one thing they refuse to let go.

The scripture is found in James 3:13 and continues into chapter 4 verse 3.

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup> For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

**4** Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

What really caught my eye when I was thinking about this scripture was the description of the wisdom that is from above (verse 17). "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy."

Did you notice willing to yield? The wisdom from above is willing to yield. How often have you or I decided upon a course of action of something we wanted and then refused to yield? The wisdom from above realizes that there is more than one way to skin a cat. You can get what you want in more than one way. If God desires something for your life or if you desire something God wants in your life, while it may not come the way you expect, God will make it happen.

Sin for you and I comes when we hang on. We are like the monkey, we see something we want or think we need and even when it leads us into trouble, we hang on thinking we are doing the right thing. Have you ever thought the devil has to work a lot less if he can give us what we want and that alone will keep us from following what God wants for our lives.

A lady once loved her girl's night out. While they did not happen every week even after she was married she continued going to dinner with the girls and occasionally to Chip and Dale dancers. As time passed what it left her husband with was a feeling that he just wasn't measuring up. Her girls night out always seemed to be more frequent when they were having difficulties. It got to be so much of a problem that he threatened to leave if she didn't quit.

For her that demand by him for her to quit was like taking away her independence. Yes, she wanted to be married to him, but not if it meant smothering her own life. She refused. They sought counseling, she would follow any advice except quitting the girls night out. After much hatred and times of bitter struggle, the couple was divorced.

It says in the marriage service that husband and wife pledge to love each other until death do us part. What parted this couple? Could it have been that she had found the fruit in the gourd to good to let go?

Those beginning verses in chapter 4 tell us where trouble comes from. "Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures."

What are you holding on to? Is it drawing you closer into relationship with God, or is someone dragging your prize further from God with each passing minute.

When I watched the specials about catching monkeys, it fascinated me as I watched the native African carrying off his prize. When the monkey's hand was firmly around the prized fruit, the African could just walk by in full view of the monkey. He grabbed the end of the rope tied to the tree and dragged the gourd, fruit and monkey back to his home, never even touching the monkey. The monkey was never touched until back at home, he hit the monkey in the head and killed it.

Is there something in your life that you are not willing to let go of? If it is anything except Jesus Christ, your hand may already be in the gourd. You see it says that wisdom is willing to yield. Can you let go of anything in your life, knowing that God can keep everything.

Will you risk letting go of some of the things in your life, knowing that God will always return to you, that which is really important for your life? We talk at St. Paul about changing lives. How about your own life? Is there something you need to let go of for God to make the changes needed in your life?

The monkey does not want to get caught. The monkey is scared to death of the hunter. The monkey is filled with fear when he cannot get his hand out of the gourd. But the fruit is good to eat, he needs to eat and he will not let the fruit go! Is there a fruit in your life, something you know may be good for you, but today is holding you captive?  
**LET GO!**

Why are we in conflict, why is there dispute in your life? Because we are holding on! The only thing in life that you need to keep holding is the hand of God. Everything else in life you can let go. Wouldn't it be a shame to come to the end of your life only to find out you hand is caught in the gourd?

**LET GO!** Ask God for his presence. That is all that matters, Jesus Christ in your life. Can you let go of the rest and cling only to Jesus Christ?