

Winners (or not)!

Jeremiah 11¹⁸⁻²⁰; Psalm 54; James 3^{13-4^{3,7-8}}; Mark 9³⁰⁻³⁷

*Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
[James 4⁷]*

Emma Radacanu won the US Open tennis tournament. She made the news because, as someone who has just had their A level results, she is young, seemingly untainted by the world and isn't bad looking. She is a winner – and that is headline news!

You get the sense from some of the readings today that winning seems to matter to people of faith:

- ✘ We heard in Jeremiah the appeal Jeremiah, whose message was rejected, makes to God **let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause**. He wants to be seen as the victor!
- ✘ The Psalmist complains about those who bother him and say, **may evil rebound on those who lie in wait for me, destroy them in your faithfulness**. Such is the writer's confidence that God will do this that he writes in the past tense of his conquest, **my eye has seen the downfall of my enemies**.
- ✘ The disciples sulked when Jesus asked them what they were arguing about after he had bared his soul about what lay ahead of his at his passion, but Jesus knew that **one the way they had argued about who was the greatest!** Which was going to emerge on top!

When Jesus responds with the clear statement, **whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all**, comparing their rights and privileges to a **little child**, and we get the point that being the best, the first, the greatest isn't something that Christians should worry about – a champion Christian is a contradiction!

How then do we become **last of all and servant of all**? James is clear, **Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you**. Unsurprisingly for James, he has very practical advice too:

- ✘ There are some people I know that are never happy unless there is some tension, some strife that divides people. It is driven by **envy and selfish**

ambition. James says that these come from the **cravings that are at war within you**.

At a funeral this week where there had been family tensions, some who had been estranged from the deceased put roses on the coffin. I could hardly believe my ears when a gentle murmur started at the back: *Too little! Too late!* I imagine that the wake was memorable too! An example of tensions within?

James may be guilty of hyperbole when he says, **you want something and do not have it; so you commit murder; you covet something and cannot obtain it so you engage in disputes and conflicts**. Whilst he is right that **you do not receive because you ask wrongly**, he hits the nail on the head when he says that we are drive **to spend what you get on pleasures**.

That sense of winners and losers, of those who despise peace and love to be the centre of attention in a chaos of their own making live lives that contradict, that negate the Gospel of Christ.

- ✘ The alternative? **Gentleness born of wisdom; wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy with good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy**. That is a world apart from the foot-stamping wilfulness that sees things in terms of winning and losing. This gets us towards Jesus' challenge: **whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all**.

The stark choice is that we **submit ourselves to God** or we don't. If we don't, we don't **resist the devil**, but we embrace him and hold him near. It is where we place ourselves: **draw near to God and he will draw near to you**.

My Grannie, in issuing her stern warnings about the corrupting influence of friends she disapproved of said, *If ye fli wi the cra's you'll get shot! (If you fly with the crows you will be shot)*. Who we chose to be with defines us – true of God and the devil as it is of our friends!

You won't make the headlines for living as a Christian – certainly not in the way that winners like Emma Radacanu. But God will see and those around you will know.