

James 5 – The Life of Living Faith

Read James 5

Vs 1 Who is being addressed here? The rich (*those abounding with material resources*). Is James saying being rich is wrong? James had developed the idea of the need for complete dependence on God. He now naturally rebuked those most likely to live independently from God – the rich. The picture here is those who hoard wealth are rich. Hoarding wealth is ungodly. What did the early disciples do? Acts 2:44-45,4:32-35 This practice is characterized as voluntary and generous, driven by the Holy Spirit to ensure no one was in need, rather than a mandatory command for all Christians throughout history. So does that mean it's wrong to save? No. Prov 21:20,13:22 Planning ahead and saving money makes it easier to accomplish goals and allows us to be more effective in ministry (see 1 Corinthians 16:2). When we don't plan ahead and save money, we are more prone to go into debt, which the Bible tells us is unwise (Proverbs 22:7). It is also true that the pursuit of riches is a motivation for every conceivable sin (1 Timothy 6:10). James is referring to people who trust in their riches. What will they do as a result? Weep and howl (both words involve making mourning noises, crying out loud) because miseries (*calamity*) will be coming upon them.

Vs 2 What happened to their riches? They are rotten. What happened to their clothing? Eaten by moths. James probably refers to the destruction of three kinds of wealth (food, clothing and money). Stores of food are corrupted (rotted), hoarded garments are moth-eaten, and (as we will see in the next verse) gold and silver are corroded.

Vs 3 When the hoarded money of the rich is corroded, what will it show (*witness*)? The corruptible nature of the wealth of the riches will witness against them. On the day of judgment, it will be revealed that they have lived their lives in the arrogant independence James previously condemned, heaping up earthly treasure in the last days, when they should have been storing treasure in heaven (Luke 18:22). What else will this corrosion do? Eat their flesh by fire. This is a word picture of being consumed in a painful manner.

Vs 4 These rich folks did more than hoard material stuff. What else did they do? They failed to compensate laborers who earned their pay. Two things cry out when this happens. What two things? First, the actual unpaid wages cry out. Do you find it strange that wages can cry out? Remember Luke 19:40 Second, the laborers cry out. See Luke 16:19-31 The sin here is covetousness and living on another man's labors; starving the poor to enrich themselves. Who heard these cries? The Lord of Heavenly armies (hosts). The use of this title was meant to give these unjust men a sober warning. The cries of the people they had oppressed had come to the ears of the God who commands heavenly armies; the God of might and power and judgment.

Vs 5 – 6 What other things did these selfish rich do? Lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury, fattened their hearts as in a day of slaughter, condemned and murdered the just who are powerless to resist them. We can be sure God's justice will prevail and ultimately, the unjust will be punished. Deu 32:35

Vs 7 What is "therefore" there for (what is the connecting thought)? James brought the issue of the ultimate judgment before us in his remarks about the ungodly rich and their destiny. Now he calls Christians (especially those enduring hardship) to patiently endure until the coming of the Lord (i.e. His second coming, not the rapture). How does he illustrate the patience we should have? Farmers, when they plant, have to wait patiently for their crops to come up. It's in God's timing, not theirs. It's the farmer's job to prepare the soil and plant the seed. God gives the increase. What is the reference to early and latter rain? In Israel, the early rains (coming in late October or early November) are essential to soften the ground for plowing, and the latter rains (coming in late April or May) are essential to the maturing of the crops shortly before harvest. What farmers and Christians have in common;

- He waits with a reasonable hope and expectation of reward.
- He waits a long time.
- He waits working all the while.
- He waits depending on things out of his own power; with his eye on the heavens.
- He waits despite changing circumstances and many uncertainties.
- He waits encouraged by the value of the harvest.
- He waits encouraged by the work and harvest of others.
- He waits because he really has no other option.
- He waits because it does no good to give up.
- He waits aware of how the seasons work.
- He waits because as time goes on, it becomes more important, and not less, to do so.

Vs 8 What two things does the coming of the Lord require of us? To be patience and establish (*to turn resolutely in a certain direction*) our hearts. Even in James' day they believed the return of Jesus was immanent (could happen at any time).

Vs 9 Knowing the return of Jesus is near, and the judgments, what should we not do? Grumble (groan) against one another (yes, even during hardships when patience is hard). What happens when we grumble? We are condemned (judged) guilty. 2 Cor 5:10

Vs 10 – 11 Who are we told to remember? The prophets, who went through much persecution, yet practiced patient endurance. Which man was particularly tested yet stood fast? Job. James essentially tells us three things about Job and why he is a significant example for the suffering Christian. 1. The perseverance of Job. Passages such as Job 1:20-22 show us the tremendous perseverance of this afflicted man, who refused to curse God despite his severe and mysterious suffering. 2. The end intended by the Lord, speaking of the ultimate goal and purpose of God in allowing the suffering to come upon Job. 3. The Lord is very compassionate and merciful. This is not immediately apparent in the story of Job; we can quickly think that God was cruel to Job. Yet in the end, we can see that God was indeed very compassionate and merciful.

Vs 12 Now it seems we have a change in topic. What is this verse about? Keeping your word. “Swear” here means to *take an oath*. Many Jewish people in the time James wrote made distinctions between “binding oaths” and “non-binding oaths.” Oaths that did not include the name of God were considered non-binding, and to use such oaths was a way of “crossing your fingers behind your back” when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemned. If you say it, do it. If you don’t mean to do it, don’t say it. Of all people, we should be men and women of our word. Remember, we will be judged for our words. Matt 12:36-37, Prov 18:21

Vs 13 Now we’re going to cover how to meet the specific needs of the Body of Christ. What are you to do if you are suffering? Instead of complaining, pray! What are cheerful people to do? Sing psalms (by implication, of gratitude).

Vs 14 – 15 If you are sick, what are you to do? Ask for the elders (those who are walking in faith) to pray for you. What else are the elders to do? Anoint the sick with oil in the Name of the Lord. What will (not might) happen as a result? The prayer, prayed in faith, will save (*sozo* in the Greek) the sick. *Sozo* means *to be made whole*. It is also translated heal in other Scriptures. See Matt 9:21-22, 10:22, 18:11, 24:13, Mark 5:23, 6:56, 10:52, 16:16, Luke 8:36, 18:42, John 3:17, 10:9, 12:47. Clearly, God does not grant immediately visible healing for every prayer of faith, and the reasons are hidden in the heart and mind of God. Still, many are not healed simply because there is no prayer of faith offered. The best approach in praying for the sick is to pray with humble confidence that they will be healed and having prayed, we simply leave the matter to God. Once they are made whole, what will the Lord do? Raise them up, meaning to rouse them up from their sickly state to one of restored health. Finally, what else will happen when this prayer of faith is prayed over the sick? His sins will be forgiven. Why do you think this statement is here? Often times, the sin of a man makes him feel condemned. When he is assured he is forgiven, the condemnation leaves and full spiritual restoration occurs. A man who is healed but still in the grips of condemnation, is not whole. A man set free from sin but sick is not whole. This Scripture is talking about wholeness physically and spiritually as a result of a prayer prayed in faith.

Vs 16 – 18 This section of Scripture goes into detail about the power of faith prayers. Why are we to confess our sins to each other? So we can pray for each other. Confess means literally *to say the same thing*. It means that in confessing sin, we agree to identify it by its true name and admit that it is sin. What happens when we pray for each other? We’ll be healed. This is a different Greek word and it means *to be healed and made whole*. Again, when I confess my sin and you pray for me, the condemnation flees and I am set up to receive my healing. Confession can free us from the heavy burdens (physically and spiritually) of unresolved sin, and removes hindrances to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is possible, although by no means always the case, that a person’s sickness is the direct result of some sin that has not been dealt with, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 11:30. How are a righteous man’s prayers described? Effective and fervent which means *operative (working), powerful*. *Avails* means *strong, powerful*. And who is righteous? Those whose sins have been forgiven. 1 John 1:9. What example of an operative, working, strong and powerful prayer is given? Elijah praying for rain to stop and start. 1 Kings 17:1, 8:41–45. How does this encourage us? Because Elijah was a man like us, and his prayers worked, so will ours!

Vs 19 – 20 What are we to do when a fellow Christian wanders from the truth? Bring them back to the truth. Having introduced the topics of sin and confession, James reminds us of the need to confront those who have wandered from the truth. Is this easy? No! Remember this should be done in humility, not arrogance or self-righteously. On the other hand, you should not be ok when a brother or sister slides back into sin. You need to love them enough to help them get back on track. There is a blessing for the one who loves his brother enough to confront him, and who turns him from the error of his ways. He has saved (*sozo*) that soul from death (separation from God) and covered (hide, referring to sins under the Blood of Jesus being washed away) a multitude of sins. James concludes with this because this is exactly what he has endeavored to do through this challenging letter – to confront those who have wandered from a living faith, endeavoring to save their souls from death, by demanding that they not only hear the word, but do it, because a living faith will have its proof in action.