

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – PART 9

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Date: 10-03-2024

Scripture: James 5:1-12

We're almost getting to the end of this letter by James. We are going to be looking at the 5th chapter, and the first 12 verses. This can easily be split into 2 sections: vs. 1-6 and vs. 7-12

James 5:1-12

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! ⁴ Behold, the pay of the labourers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵ You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

Heavenly Father, we ask that You would touch our hearts, our minds, our wills and that we would be able to align with You this morning. speak to us through Your Word. We ask in the beautiful name of Jesus. Amen.

SECTION 1. (vs. 1-6)

Here James is addressing some men who were rich and using their riches in a selfish manner while exploiting the poor in the process. Now, James does not in any way disparage the rich or say it is wrong to be wealthy. There are people mentioned in the bible who used their riches and wealth wisely, viz. Abraham, Job, Isaac, Solomon, and then David, Zacchaeus, Matthew, Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, Dorcas. All of them were people who had wealth. The Bible does not have anything against wealth. But the question always when it comes to dealing with wealth or riches is this: How loosely do we hold onto it? Would you be willing to walk away from it if the Lord required you to do so?

In Matthew 19:17, the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said, "You know – do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false testimony against others, and honor your father and mother." And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." Jesus said to him, "Go, sell all that

you have, give to the poor and come follow Me.” And the Bible says that he went away grieving for he was one who owned much property. He wasn’t willing to give it up to follow the Lord.

So the question is: does it get in the way of our love for the Lord? Does your focus on making wealth take place to the exclusion of God in our lives? These are good questions for us to think about, because the Bible has many examples of how money has gotten in the way of good fellowship with God. In and of itself, money is not sinful; it’s neutral. But as 1 Timothy 6:10 points out: The love of money is the root of all evil.

Psalm 62:10 reminds us, “If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.” No, the issue here is not about wealth. In fact, the natural consequence of working hard, or being diligent and industrious in your work is that you will prosper, you will do well, you will be recognized in the companies you work with and you will be promoted and compensated as much.

The Bible tells us “Do everything as unto the Lord.” So, if we work like that in our environments, we will be recognized and we will prosper. No! The Bible is not talking about the accumulating of wealth because that’s almost a natural consequence of hard work. When James is talking to these men, he asks them these questions and wants them to think:

- How did you acquire it? And the answer is that they acquired it by not paying their laborers well.
- How were they using it? It says they were living luxuriously and a life of wanton pleasure.
- How had they exploited the poor? They had exploited the poor and grown rich by withholding wages from laborers.

So, that’s what he’s coming against them with.

The Bible gives us a wonderful assurance when we look at the resources, the financial good that God has given us, and we are always mindful of people who don’t have as much.

Proverbs 19:17 “If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord, and He will repay you.” God becomes your debtor when you look after the poor. And He will repay.

So, these are some thoughts that James has placed before us in these first six verses.

SECTION 2 (vs. 7-12)

He’s addresses some of the issues that come with the reality of the situation that those who are not as fortunate live in. And so, he says to them that there are three things that you need to make a part of your life. Let’s look at these 3 areas and see how we can mine them.

1. Patient endurance. v.7 Be patient and endure.

James actually gives us 3 examples when he talks about patient endurance.

- **Look at the farmer.** He plants the seed and then he waits. There’s nothing that he does to try and hurry up the work, or hurry up the growing of what he has planted. He waits.

Yesterday, our podcast reading was from Mark’s gospel: “The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. As soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.

So, the farmer waits patiently, knowing that there is a time that must elapse between the time he has planted to the time that he can reap a harvest. So, James is saying: Patiently wait, endure what is going on. Ultimately the crop will come. no amount of anxiety will hasten it. there’s nothing to do but to let the time run out. Look to the other things that need to happen. Don’t stand around idly waiting. There

are so many other things that you can do during this time, and God wants you to fulfill those things as well. therefore, hand in there; stay the course; wait for the spirit to pass and patience will bear good results.

- **Look at the prophets.** They went through suffering and pain while speaking in the name of the Lord. Yet, they remained faithful to God. Sometimes we think: I am a child of God, and I'm doing that work that He has called me to do. Why then, am I going through suffering and pain? Suffering and pain are par for the course even for those who have been called by God (and I use 'call' in a very general way that all of us have been called). All of us have a purpose. You may or may not have responded to that call; but that's a different story altogether.

The call of God upon us is to fulfill the plan and purpose that each of us have when we were placed here on earth. Why have you been placed here in the 21st century? Why not the 15th? Why have you been placed here in India? Why not somewhere else in the world? God has a plan and a purpose for each one of us here. So it says, find out. While you're waiting for this time to pass, there are so many things that you can continue to do. Don't be idle.

Then, he says, they remained faithful. They continued to do the work that God had called them to do. Elijah told Ahab that there would be no rain for three years. And he continued to do the work even though he himself was also affected by the drought. Though we know that God took care of him. God took him to a brook and showed him water, until that brook also dried up. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was in prison during the siege of Jerusalem. They put him in prison for the warnings that he kept giving them. Daniel was thrown in the lion's den. John the Baptist was beheaded.

So, just being obedient to God doesn't in any way preclude us from pain and suffering. The work of the Lord needs to continue. To live faithfully in the midst of difficult situations is a living and powerful witness to everyone who watches you. People should look at you and say: "I know what you're going through. I know the difficult situation or circumstance that you are in. how is it that you can continue to walk with such faith and harmony and equilibrium?"

During these times, one of the things that we can do is to get to know the Word even more so that God can use them strategically in our lives. How many times has God brought a verse to you when you needed to hear it? I am so thrilled with the number of you who opted to memorize a verse every day through Lent. Forty verses are going to be in your treasure house when we reach Easter; 40 verses that God can use to speak to you. If you don't know the Word, how can He speak? It's so important to be able to use every moment we have to soak in the Word and see what we can get from the Word.

- **We look to Job.** (v. 11). When we go through difficult times, if you want to get a perspective on some of the issues that you face, read Job. It will put everything in a different light. I'm not at all trying to minimize anything that you're going through at this time. But when we read Job, we realize so much of what he went through without knowing why, but we do. He didn't know, and yet he stayed faithful to the Lord. God allowed Satan to do what he did, and at the end of it, Job was blessed with even more than he had before. He was unaware of what was going on between God

and Satan. "Have you considered my servant Job?" and then Job lost everything – his wealth, his children. His wife even told him to curse God and die. Friends who came to commiserate with him finally ended up telling him that he was paying for his sins. Even God couldn't be heard in the midst of all that he was suffering. And yet, he remained faithful. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will return. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

He says: There's something about Job too, that you need to understand – that God sometimes allows Satan to afflict us. Here's the thing though. It's not that God sends it. Satan wants to come against His children, and God wants us to shine in these moments. One, because He knows you can shine. Understand that. He is omniscient; He knows all things. He knows the strength you have. He knows the faith you have. He knows you can come through it just as Job did. And when we come through it, we come through stronger.

Jesus told Peter, "Satan asked me to sift you like wheat." What did Jesus pray for? "I prayed that your faith would remain firm." Not that Satan couldn't do it, but that his faith would remain firm. God puts a boundary on the things that Satan can do to us, and within that boundary is the faith that God has that we can come through it. He did the same for Job. "You may test him. Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically. That's the boundary. And when that didn't work, Satan came back to him, and God again said, "Do what you please with him, but you cannot take his life." A boundary.

Today, we benefit from reading what happened with Job. You know the line where he says, "I want a mediator between God and me to stand up and say why is this happening." How many times have you and I resonated with that. Yet, know that God is in control. God has set boundaries that Satan cannot cross.

Satan's plan is to make us impatient with God. In our time of suffering, instead of being patient and enduring, he wants us to be impatient. Dr. Warren Wiersby says, "An impatient Christian is a powerful weapon in Satan's hands."

Impatience hasn't gone well with people in the Bible. Moses got impatient and struck the rock. And every time we read it, we really empathize with Moses. Why did he hit the rock? Earlier in Exodus, God told him to strike the rock. But in Numbers 20, God says, "Speak to the rock." And it seems like as we grow in the Lord, we need to meet every nuanced voice of God with obedience. We need to realize that there's a difference when God says 'strike' and when He says 'speak'. We can't interchange each other. As we grow in Him, God continues to speak words that are very clear and very specific. And there are consequences when we don't listen. Moses paid for it. he wasn't able to lead the children into the Promised Land. Ishmael was a result of Abraham's impatience. And we know where that has gone. Peter's impatience almost made him a murderer. If he had gone two inches to the left or the right, he would have been in prison. Thankfully, only the ear fell off when he took his sword out and hit the chief priest's servant.

How do we respond in this situation as we go through difficult times doing what God wants us to do. We need to keep trusting Him and relying on His promises. Maybe you're feeling that your prayers are not being heard, which is not true. God does hear, but God chooses not to say anything. But the one place that God has said

enough is the Word of God. And from this, you can mine the things that you need for moments like this.

2 Corinthians 12:9 *“My grace will be sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in your weakness.”* So, as you go through a difficult time, just be reminded that in your weakness, God’s strength is pouring into you, enabling you to walk through.

Isaiah 40:29-31 *“He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.”* I wonder whether you’re weak this morning? Powerless? The Bible says that He gives strength to people like you. *“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find a new strength.”* Not yesterday’s strength, but a new strength will come upon you when you trust. Everyday as you trust Him, new strength comes. *“You will soar high on wings like eagles; you will run and not grow weary, you will walk and not faint.”*

Hebrews 13:5 He Himself has said, *“I will never leave you; I will never forsake you.”* Maybe today you’re here and you’re feeling very alone. Maybe you’re saying: I don’t have too many people around me to support me, who believe in me, who can walk with me through this difficult time. I’m a lonely person. The truth is you’re never alone, beloved. Never! Right there next to you is the Lord. His Word to you is: I’ll never leave you.

2. Don’t complain or grumble against each other. (v. 9)

The word grumble means to sigh often, sigh deeply, to moan or to groan. It is kind of a resentment not fully expressed. And James is appealing to his readers not to bemoan each other’s state of affairs. They were complaining intensely and excessively about each other. Some people were chronic complainers. And the word ‘against’. Don’t grumble against means to put down or to diminish somebody else. Impatience with our lot makes us impatient with others. And then he says ‘with one another’. In other words, with each other in the family of God. He says brethren, meaning that we are all part of one family. He says, “Don’t complain, groan, mumble against each other, lest you be condemned.”

Romans 14:10 *Jesus will judge our resentful attitudes towards fellow believers at the judgment seat of Christ.* Sometimes these verses get hidden from us. Suddenly they pop up and we realize that we don’t have to look very far to see our bad attitude. And yet it says, Jesus will judge our resentful attitude towards fellow believers.

2 Corinthians 5:10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It’s very easy to blame somebody else for the troubles that we are in. And that’s what naturally comes when we are in trouble. We like to gripe. And yet, someone who’s content with his or her own life doesn’t envy or hold any grudges against them.

Philippians 2:14-16 *Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.*

This is one of the most beautiful verses for us, as men and women of the faith; and one of the most challenging. It tells us that in a world like the one that we live in, our responsibility in the midst of this darkness is to be able to shine like lights, like stars in the night, that people see something flickering and say, “That’s a Christian!” Can you imagine when that happens

consistently and together rather than sporadic and phased out? All those stars will bring light into dark situations. He says that we live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, and in this generation, we are then called to shine like stars.

3. Do not swear. (v. 12)

Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you do not fall under judgment.

The Jews of that time used various oaths to back up their statements. They, of course, never use the name of God because they were very worried about the sin of blaspheming against God. But they would use other things like: I swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or even by their own heads.

And James actually is piggy-backing off something Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:34 ³⁴ *But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."*

James is reminding the people that when you say "by heaven or by earth or by my head or whatever, or the city of Jerusalem", you're still bringing the name of the Lord in. Because as Jesus said, "The Lord is the ruler of heaven. Earth is His footstool.. Jerusalem is the city of God. And there is nothing you can do to keep the hair on your head. so, let your yes be yes, and your no be no." Today the phrase generally used is 'I swear on my mother's grave, or on my children's heads.' And James is saying that we ought to be careful. As Christians, we need to have so much character and integrity that when we tell somebody yes, they must walk away saying, "That is sufficient for me because I know that you're a person of great character. Your yes will be yes, and your no will be no. There's no need for an oath.

And in the first 12-13 verses of the first chapter, James pointed out that suffering produces good character.

APPLICATION:

- 1)** If we have wealth, we need to not only use it wisely, but hold it loosely as well. make sure that it never replaces our dependence and trust in God, and that it is not accumulated by exploiting poor or less privileged people around us.
- 2)** Patience is a virtue. In fact, it is a fruit of the Spirit, and impatience can give birth to ungodly circumstances. Suffering and pain can be a part of being obedient to God, and that through it all, our witness must never flag or falter. Through it all, they should be able to smell the aroma of God in us.
- 3)** Grumbling and complaining about each other isn't healthy within the family of God.
- 4)** We should so build up our character that our word is taken in simplicity. Yes means yes, and no means no.

Let's pray:

Our Heavenly Father, You have opened Your Word for us. And now, would You place upon our hearts those things that we must pay heed to, those things that You want to be a part of our lives, or maybe those things that we ought not to have as part of our lives. show us, Lord, what we need to put on

and what we need to put off. And then fill us with Your Holy Spirit that these changes would become embedded in our hearts and our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.