**BOOK OF JAMES CHAPTER 5**

**JAMES 5:1-20**

This morning we’ll wrap up our study of the Book of James looking at Chapter 5. In this chapter James continues his thought reminding those who of us who call ourselves Christians how we are to live. He addresses three areas: (1) our material possessions, (2) our attitudes toward each other, and (3) the importance of prayer in our lives.

I’m going to go ahead and read the whole chapter and then we’ll go back and discuss the verses.

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. 7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. 12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. 19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Comments? Questions?

V 1-3, James here paints a pretty bleak picture of materialism. “Weep and howl” refers to the loud crying produced by the bitterness, cynicism, emptiness and disappointment of materialism. Bottom line, the riches of this world don’t last. James describes gold and silver becoming tarnished and clothes becoming moth-eaten. The things we work so hard to get eventually fall apart, wear out, spoil, break down, depreciate, rot, get stolen, or just fall into disuse. The main point James is making here is that in the long run money and things will not fulfill us. Only Jesus Christ can completely satisfy our deepest needs.

James then mentions several actions associated with the sin of materialism…

V 4-6, James says there has been cheating and fraud committed in the unfair payment of wages to employees. Malachi 3:5 states that the judgment of God is “against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages.” James in these verses mentions the selfish lifestyle, the wanton self-indulgence produced by a people who pursue after personal pleasure. He describes how the rich and powerful often take advantage of the righteous.

The Bible does not condemn money. First Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” It is the LOVE of money and not the money itself that’s the problem. The Bible does not condemn the rich for being rich. God pronounces his judgment on the rich for what is in their heart. Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:25) Why is it so difficult for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven? Because their material possessions provide a false sense of security and create distractions from what is really important.

Do you remember the rich man and Lazarus? Luke 16:19-31, the rich man, while he was alive, did nothing to help Lazarus, a poor man who was laid at his gate. After both of them died, the tables were turned. The rich man ended up in hell and begged for Lazarus to come and cool his tongue. The rich man tragically pleads with Father Abraham to help him, but it is too late. The rich man is receiving what he deserves for how he lived his life. He is being held accountable by God for what he did not do.

In the parable of the rich fool, Luke 12:16-21, Jesus showed how God judges those who leave Him out of their plans and live for themselves. This goes right along with what we learned in JAMES Chapter 4, namely, the sin of presumption in leaving God out of their plans.

The Bible teaches that being materially rich has a spiritual down side: (1) A tendency to live for our own pleasures, (2) A tendency toward being self-reliant and leaving God out, and (3) A tendency not to treat others fairly and with kindness

Remember James’ main point throughout this letter – you proclaim with your mouth that you have faith in Christ, well, the proof of that claim is in how you are living your life. OK, James, what should be our proper attitude in this life?

V 7-8, To fully appreciate what James is saying here look at it in context with verse 6: “You have condemned and murdered the righteous person.” The righteous refers to Christians who do not resist their heathen oppressors. And now James explains why. As believers we are to exercise godly patience. This is certainly not an easy thing to do because it is not natural. Human nature says, “I don't have to put up with that.” We want to fight back, get mad, or take revenge. However, this is not at all what God's word directs. As Christians we are told as individuals to endure unfair and harsh treatment without retaliation or anger. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 6:29, “To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.”

How is it that we can endure patiently while being mistreated? James tells us twice in these verses to remember that the coming of the Lord is near. Either He will come back and take us out of this world (the rapture) or we will die and go to be with Him. The Bible tells us that “[to] be away from the body” [is to be] “at home with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8) We are to live expectantly, as though Jesus is coming back soon. We need to realize that this life and all of its problems are only temporary. Praise God that a better world awaits us and it will come sooner than any of us can imagine. So by keeping that at the forefront of our minds we’ll be able to endure a lot.

V 9, Our attitude with our fellow laborers in Christ is important as well. We should not complain and we should not stand in judgment of each other. There is only one judge and, guess what? We are not Him! God is at this very moment observing our behavior.

One of the things that I think makes James easy to understand for me is that while making his points he gives examples of what he’s talking about. That’s what he does next. He gives us some godly examples of those who have gone before us and exemplified endurance in the midst of terrible trials.

V 10-11, James reminds us of the O.T. prophets. They suffered, yet they were patient and endured. They offer us examples of how we should react, what our attitude should be, when affliction comes. The truth is that we will probably never face persecution to the degree that they did. The writer of Hebrews at the end of Chapter 11, the faith chapter, mentions the sufferings of nameless saints. The writer goes on to tell us that these great men and women of faith did not receive a reward here in this life but, because of their patient, enduring faith, they will receive a much greater eternal reward.

Then there’s Job. We have all heard about the patience of Job. But Job only learned patience after going through the trials that God allowed in his life. This is the very thing that James emphasized back in Chapter 1. We develop strength of character through the difficult circumstances of life. I remember a quote from my youth that went like this: “Please be patient. God is not finished with me yet.” That’s exactly what James is trying to tell his readers.

V 12, Be honest in your conversation with God and with other people. In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:34-37, Jesus taught that God does not want us to make vows or oaths. He does not want us to make deals with Him. He prefers that we simply be men and women of our word. We simply keep our word to God and to others. No excuses. If we say YES then we mean it. YES does not mean maybe. It does not mean “if I feel like it” or “if I don't have anything else going on.” If we say NO we mean that also. Say what you mean and don't make promises you can't keep. If you commit to something, then follow through on it and keep your word. If you don't then God’s word tells us that’s a sin.

The last 8 verses of this chapter deal with the priority of prayer in the life of a Christian. At the beginning of our study I mentioned that James had the nickname of “old camel knees” because of his fervent dedication to prayer which caused calluses to form on his knees. So I think that James knows of what he’s talking about with this subject.

Back in Ch 1 James said, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5) Later, in Ch 4 James again mentions prayer, this time it is in the context of conflict within the church: “You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:2-3)

Here in Chapter 5 James again brings up prayer, encouraging us to pray. He instructs us to ask God for wisdom and discernment in life’s many difficult and confusing situations.

V 13, James mentions two opposite extremes that we all experience at some point in our lives. They are suffering, the difficult times, and being cheerful, the good times. In all circumstances, whether they are good or bad, happy or sad, pleasant or not, we need to remember to involve God.

V 14, The “oil” mentioned in this verse is both a medicine that can help to heal the body and is also a symbol of the Spirit or presence of God. According to one commentary I read the meaning of this verse urges the treating of sickness by medical means accompanied by prayer. The two are to be used together. In other words, we pray for healing, we seek proper medical attention; then, we leave the results up to God.

V 15, God heals both our physical sickness and our spiritual sickness. He heals the body and He heals the soul. Our prayers, both individual and corporate, are an important part of God's healing process. When healing does take place, don't forget to give God the glory and honor He deserves.

V 16, Christ's death on the cross split the veil of the temple in two from the top to the bottom (Mark 15:38). Man's sins, which separate us from God, have been dealt with thru the shed blood of Jesus Christ. We no longer have to go thru a priest, but we could go directly to God confessing our sin and asking for His forgiveness. However, when we sin against another person it is important and biblical that we also confess our sins to that person and ask them for their forgiveness. A powerful statement is made at the end of this verse: “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

V 17-18, James gives us a wonderful example of a man with an effective prayer life, the Old Testament prophet Elijah. His prayers even influenced the weather! Elijah who is mentioned in 1 Kings 17 and 18 was most certainly a righteous man. His prayers were effective. Why? Because he prayed according to God's will; he was specific; and he prayed in faith.

V 19-20, As James closes his letter he offers one last thought-provoking challenge to us. We need to take sin seriously, both in our own lives and in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. The N.T. teaches church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Matthew 18:15-18 and Titus 3:10-11. We need to realize that if a Christian continues in his or her sin, it could lead to their untimely physical death. Therefore, we need to take very seriously our responsibility to turn away, first, from our own sin and then to help our brothers and sisters in Christ turn away from their sin.

Thoughts before we sing?