

# True Spiritual Community

Week Six  
August 2 – August 6

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**A Daily Study of the Book of James  
Summer 2021**

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*"The prayer of a righteous person  
is powerful and effective."*

*James 5.16b*

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**Cornerstone Assembly of God**  
10551 Chalkley Rd, N. Chesterfield, VA 23237

**Monday, August 2.....James 5.1-6**

## **Danger, Will Robinson!**

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup>Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does James' rebuke of the selfish rich echo that of Jesus' beatitudes and woes in His Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6.20-26)?
  - a. How does Jesus' message explain His good news to the poor?
  - b. How does Jesus take the socially accepted ideas and flip them upside down?
  - c. Why does Jesus speak 'woes' on those most admired by the world?
  - d. How is Jesus announcing true Kingdom justice?
2. In the words of our Namibian brother Paul John Issak, how are we, as followers of Jesus, who have heard the words of James "responsible for formulating concrete ethics and principles and policies that will ensure blessedness for the poor today?"
3. Why are the following four actions of the wealthy considered sins?
  - a. Hoarding their wealth and failing to help the poor:
  - b. Failure to pay their employees their just wages:
  - c. Living self-indulgent lives, built on the backs of the disenfranchised:
  - d. Manipulating the justice system, misusing their influence and position:

## • PRAYER POINT •

### NO LONGER LOST IN SPACE

- Thankfully God has not been vague with us regarding our responsibilities to one another as His image bearers. Take time today and reflect on systems of injustice that He brings to mind.
- What are activities, acts of mercy, you can do now to serve others from the gifts God has placed in your life?
- What are actions you can take, verbal and holistic stances through which you can stand with those who have been oppressed?
- Invite the Spirit in to make an inventory of your wealth. Are there things that should be surrendered to the Lord to take their burden off of our soul? Hesychius told us in the fifth century that “God delays the judgment because of His love for humanity...” Thank Him for His delay, and bring your house in order today.

## COMMENTARY

v. 1: **Come now, you rich**...James calls back to his previous section (4.13-17) by using the same phrase. He moves from specifically reproving the wealthy merchants who are assuming their success is totally within their control to now call all the wealthy to genuine repentance.

They have rejected Jesus' very command: "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (Luke 12.33).

**weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you**...In a way, Charles Dickens retells James' exhortation here in his classic *A Christmas Carol*. In the tale, Ebenezer Scrooge, a wealthy and miserly businessman is shown three glimpses across time: past, present and future. On his current trajectory he will die alone, only leaving a bitter and impoverished legacy for those around him. James, like Dickens, invites the Scrooges of the first century church to weep and grieve as they see their funerals in advance.

The Greek word used for howling, wailing for the miseries to come, is used exclusively in the Greek translation of the Old Testament "when the subject is God's judgment on those who have committed apostasy (Ezekiel 21.17; Hosea 8.3; Zechariah 11.2)." (Witherington).

The rich should grieve like they are watching their own funerals, knowing the intense judgment to come because of the severe and negative impact they've had on those around them. This should throw them into fits of uncontrollable weeping and unprecedented wailing as they watch their own death march to condemnation.

v. 2-3: **Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire**...All of the devastation on their worldly wealth is in the perfect tense. Although their fine clothes, opulent wealth and stockpiles of gold look fine. they are already rotted, rusted and ruined (Witherington).

James uses a trilogy of unique words: rotted, moth-eaten and rusted. The riches of the wealthy have rotted. They have become putrid, decaying like clothes on a corpse. The clothes in their vast closets have become fodder for moths, pock marked and wasted. Their gold and silver are tarnished, exposing their low quality and empty value.

It becomes clear that James knew gold does not rust when we recognize his intentional word choice. The word translated 'rust' or 'corrode' is the same word for poison James used in 3.8. Just as the tongue is filled with deadly poison, a corrupting and destructive power unleashed by double-minded sinners, so the hoarded riches of

this world are poisoned from within. The wealthy have stored up the wrong things in the wrong places. They failed to humble themselves (James 1.9-11) and heed Jesus' words: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal," (Matthew 6.19-20).

Not only are their gold and silver poisoned, but they will be used like exhibit A and B against them in their divine judgment! The wealthy will not be able to bribe their way out of justice this time. They will not be able to sway the direction of the judge with monetary favors. The riches they put their hope and future into will turn against them "in a final act of cosmic betrayal" (McKnight).

**You have laid up treasure in the last days...** Here James is building on the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 6.19-20). The hollow riches they've stored up for eternity will actually serve as indictments against them in the last days. Peter David makes an interesting point that should be considered regarding the last days. It could be well argued that the last days in the New Testament eschatology have already begun. Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension as well as the empowerment of the Church have (Mark 1.15; Acts 2.17; Hebrews 1.2) inaugurated the last days (McKnight). The rich are living out of touch with the times. In a sense, they are living as if the end times have not begun, living a 'life as normal' existence. They are delusional and arrogant, busy filling up their barns and back accounts through systems of injustice and abuse.

v. 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...** James has called the people to repentance. For those who refused to humble themselves before the Lord, he holds nothing back in hopes they will be shaken out of their spiritual stupor. He rebuked the unrepentant teachers in the church (4.1-6), he upbraided the arrogant traveling salesmen (4.13-17). Here he holds the wealthy to task for their sins against the poor, warning them that God has heard the cries of the oppressed. The wealthy Messianic Jews would not miss the corollary here. They are like the Egyptians that enslaved their ancestors. Their unjust systems and lascivious greed have caused a cry of anguish to be lifted up before God (Exodus 3.7).

"Look at this!" James shouts to his audience. "These are the examples of acts of injustice that are crying out before the Lord," he says. The rich have defrauded the poor working in their industries. James continues to hold up Leviticus 19 as a mirror before them. "You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; you shall not hold back for yourself the wages of a hired worker until morning." (19.13). The wages withheld cry out on behalf of the cheated against the rich, like spilled blood of murdered Abel cried out against his brother Cain (Genesis 4.10). The cries of the abused workers have reached God's ears (Deuteronomy 24.15; Jeremiah 22.13).

In a reverse from the injustice systems of this world that favor the rich, “the poor will be the ones to lay the charge, and the rich will be powerless before this judge, who cannot be manipulated or bribed,” (Andria). James reveals an existential irony: the rich people who dragged the believers into corrupted court (James 2.6) will stand before the court of God, the incorruptible King.

**v. 5: You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter...**The prophet Ezekiel tells of people who behaved in this same self-indulgent and abusive way: the people of Sodom (Ezekiel 16.49). The wicked rich in the Messianic communities across the Empire have more in common with the destroyed people of Sodom than with God’s chosen people Israel. Living self-indulgent lives, built on the backs of the disenfranchised, has opened them to divine judgment. They are fattening themselves for the slaughter! All this time they were stealing the food from the hungry, only to discover too late that their own fat necks were rolling toward judgment.

James is not condemning comfort or financial stability (Nehemiah 9.25 LXX). He is condemning the debauched luxury that comes at the expense of others, the self-indulgence that gives oneself over completely to hedonism (Amos 6.4 LXX).

**v. 6: You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you...**The guilt of the rich is not only that they withheld deserved payment, funds and resources from the poor under their employment, they have corrupted the justice system against them. Make no mistake, although the law of the land made the killing appear legal, the rich have murdered those who stood in their way. They have weaponized the system against those who need it most.

In the words of Craig Blomberg, “The murder here most likely is judicial, whereby the wealthy landowners take smaller, poorer indebted farmers to court, stripping them of their land and thus of their source of income, and then hiring them back again to work their former property as sharecroppers.” He goes on to argue that “In the Jewish world, to deprive a person of their support was the same as murdering them (Sirach 34.21-22).”

Interpreting this verse the theologian Theophylact believed that the righteous person was both those who suffered under the wealthy, but also the Lord Jesus Christ. In this way, the rich abusing people in the local church are cast as members of the crucifixion crowd, the Romans, the Herodian family and the mob.

Tuesday, August 3.....James 5.7-9

## **Patiently Establish Your Heart In the Waiting**

<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.



## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Read the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18.21-35) in light of James' call for Christians to be patient with one another, slow to anger and slow to respond. Write down your observations.
  
2. How does James call us to endurance?
  
3. Read Psalm 111 with special attention to verse 8.
  - a. Where is the psalmist (v. 1)?
  
  - b. What examples of great works could the psalmist have in mind (v. 2-3)?
  
  - c. Why is it important to be reminded the Lord is merciful and compassionate (v. 4)?
  
  - d. How does God show us how He is merciful and compassionate (v. 5)? What implications should this have on us as His people?
  
  - e. The psalmist rejoices that the hearts of God's people are established, stabilized and upright in Him. How is this similar to James' prayerful command to the Church (v. 8 and James 5.8)?
  
4. How does James reinforce Leviticus 19.18 highlighting the counter-productivity of grumbling and judging one another?

## • PRAYER POINT •

ENDURANCE, PATIENCE, HOPE

- Solomon Andria writes: “Endurance, patience and hope are three important themes in this letter. They blend well with the central theme of putting the word into practice. Faith should express itself in concrete action. Society judges Christians not on the faith they profess but on the way they live.”
- Pray the Lord would give you and His people around you peace as you endure all kinds of trials.
- Ask the Lord to give you a perspective on the lives of the men, women and children around you that produces a Christ-centered patience, a slow temper that seeks to celebrate the image of God in every person.
- Rejoice that redeemed and restored you have an eternal hope, a joy unspeakable that is at the heart of your faith!

## COMMENTARY

**Therefore**...James the preacher is bringing his sermon to a close. The airplane is circling the airport, and the pilot is ready to bring it in for a landing. He will not laden his letter with the usual pleasantries, final greetings and of future plans to visit. It's as if James the preacher has given everyone in the room something to think and pray about and he will not needlessly break that flow. One can imagine the orators reading James' message in fellowships great and small all across the Mediterranean, sweating as they read some passages, boldly lifting their voices with others. At the close of this section (5.7-20), the room would be left quiet with the last words read. James has made his final emotional appeal. Now it is up to each person to respond.

Ben Witherington has presented the idea that James concludes his sermon like a deliberate Aristotelian conclusion whose three main functions were "recapitulation, emotional appeal and amplification" — all of which can be seen in the last 13 verses.

v. 7: **Be patient brothers, until the coming of the Lord**...The word patience is of real biblical importance. It is the Greek word *makrothumeo*. It means to be long suffering, slow tempered, a person who has a slow fuse in regards to the frustrations that come.

In Jesus' parable, this is the patience (*makrothumeo*) the unmerciful servant cries for from the king (Matthew 18.26). His king was merciful enough, allowing himself to be moved to compassion. Literally, the king felt it in his gut that forgiving the servant's debt was the right thing to do so he showed him incredible mercy (v. 27). Sadly, the unmerciful servant was not so forgiving. When he shook a fellow servant to pay him back the few pennies he was owed, the man cried for the same patience (*makrothumeo*). Instead, the unmerciful man had his peer thrown into debtor's prison.

The Apostle Peter personally knew the long-suffering patience of God. He was the recipient of Jesus' parable and Jesus' modeling of mercy (Matthew 18.21-35). The depth of this story rooted itself deeply in Peter's heart. When trying to explain to the impatient believers of his day why the Day of the Lord seemed to be delayed, he explained it in terms of God's long-suffering, His enduring patience longing to give time for everyone to be restored (2 Peter 3.9).

James, like Peter, is calling the Messianic believers to abandon their useless speculating about the last times and instead slow down and be patient. Their impatience is not leading to missionary zeal to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the lost but has become a distraction, as they try to create "corporate ladders" of status in the church, just as John and his brother James did before Jesus' crucifixion (Mark 10.35-45). Just as their request to be seated at the right and left sides of Jesus' Messianic throne (a posturing for power) created indignation in the other 10 disciples (v. 41), so the same actions in the churches were causing disunity and infighting.

Instead, James is encouraging them—in the midst of their trials and difficulties (James 1.2)—to see the coming of the Lord Jesus as “the only perfect comfort that people can find in the midst of injustice” (Blomberg).

**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...**James the preacher gives them a new illustration to attach to his call for patience: a serene farmer. The farmer works the land, faithfully and consistently puts into practice his daily, weekly and annual routines. Even still, all his best efforts cannot make the rain fall. He cannot predict that his crop will yield or there won't be a drought. He cannot rush the seeds to grow or the buds to instantly produce fruit.

The climate of James' experience brought rains in around October/November and again in March/April. These two rainy seasons provided the farmers with an estimated time with which to prepare their lands and plant their seeds. Like those middle Eastern farmers, we must not sit around waiting for the first signs of the coming rain. We must put our faith into practice, weeding our lives, tilling the soil of our own fields and helping those of our neighbors, actively and patiently waiting for the Lord.

v.8: **You also, be patient.**...As seen above, James' “first exhortation to patience (5:7a) is followed by an illustrative example that defines the meaning of patience (5:7b). The second exhortation to patience (5:8a) is followed by an exhortation to be strengthened (5:8b) and a reason to be both patient and strong, namely, the imminent coming of the Lord (5:8c),” (McKnight). This repetition is intentional and important.

**Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand...**Establish your hearts, or ‘strengthen your heart’ comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (for example, Judges 19.5, 8). In the first instance, it is the Levite's father-in-law who does not want him to leave Bethlehem, entreating his son-in-law to stay and be refreshed in his home. The father-in-law is trying to create a constructive environment for the health of his daughter's frustrated marriage. The phrase ‘establish your heart’ carries the image of solidly planting something, to affix supports to a plant so that it can stand strong and straight.

Psalms 111 uses the same Greek phrase in verse 8. The psalmist exalts in the Lord surrounded by the righteous (is this not the very thing James' is calling for in the Messianic congregations listening to his message?). He celebrates the works of the Lord, the great wonders He has done and brings to mind. God provides food and provision for His people. In verse 8 the hearts of God's people are established. Trusting in the Lord can strengthen a person's heart just like a meal can spark life back for a hungry person (Psalm 57.7; consider 1 Samuel 14.24-28).

v. 9: **Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged...**Solomon Andria wisely tell us that “Grumbling is a sign of disorder and misunderstanding, and also reveals a failure to control the tongue, which causes great

damage among Christians (see 3:1-10).” Like the people of Israel grumbled and complained against Moses at the bitter waters of Mara (Exodus 15.22-26), James charges the Messianic Christians to not be like their ancestors. They judged Moses and were judged by God with the same rigidity.

Again, James reminds them of their family bonds in Christ. They are brothers and sisters. The external forces of injustice, coupled with some self-seeking leaders and oppressive rich people in the church, it is understandable that the tired and exhausted people wanted to complain. “Oppression leads to consternation and the yearning desire to find a way out. James knows this so he counsels the messianic community not to let their anger turn to grumbling, wrathful violence, yearning to climb over one another” (McKnight).

**behold, the Judge is standing at the door...**To grumble against one another is to judge one another. James is reminding them to not be so quick to forget what he just said (4.11-12). “Behold, look!” he says, as if pointing at the doorway of the room where they’ve been backbiting and accusing one another, “Look! The true Judge, God Himself, is standing at the door.” In a moment, James will mention Job, who wanted his day in court before God and got it. Perhaps James is foreshadowing that they may not really want what they are asking for (Job 13.3; 38.1, 40.1-7).

Wednesday, August 4.....James 5.10-13

## **Toward the Full Integration of Life**

<sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.







## • PRAYER POINT •

### A SHARED LIFE IN THE UPS AND DOWNS

- If you were sitting with Jesus today, would you feel your life is marked by a single-minded integrity? Ask the Lord to illuminate your heart to see where you need to bring your walk into balance with your calling (Ephesians 4.1).
- Do you feel like you are barely holding on? Life is spinning out of control, and you are being pulled apart into every direction? Don't struggle alone. Call on the spiritually mature people in your life to stand with you. Be careful not to invite the immature, like the friends of Job, who will cause more grief as they misunderstand your trials and misrepresent God.
- As you lean together with mature followers of Jesus toward God, celebrate that this moment of pain in your life can lead to joy and victory. Be refreshed in the nearness of God.
- Do you feel like you are on top of the world? Take time to celebrate before the Lord. Write a poem of praise, compose a song of rejoicing. Ask God how His overflowing love and mercy can best pour out of your life into the lives of others.

## COMMENTARY

v. 10: **As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord...** James has made deliberate use of the heroes of the Jewish faith, the faithful men and women who peopled the story of Israel such as Abraham and Rahab. Now he will use a few more before closing his message: the prophets—specifically Elijah—and Job.

The prophets of the Old Testament are excellent examples of patient endurance under the hard press of suffering. They exemplified patience (*makrothumia*), that long-suffering, enduring patience in the face of trials and tribulations. This feminine noun, related to the verb *makrothumeo* seen in 5.7, is carefully placed here. The Apostle Peter uses this noun describing how God patiently waited “in the days of Noah while the ark was being built” providing his image bearers time to repent and be saved from the coming judgment (1 Peter 3.20). He uses the same noun again in his second letter for the believers make this truth paramount in their minds: the Lord’s patience (*makrothumia*) is salvation for us (2 Peter 3.15). God is the perfect example of divine patient endurance.

Here, James calls his Jewish audience to take the prophets as their examples, their models to emulate. As they face trials, they should consider them all joy (James 1.2), knowing that they are living like the prophets who carried God’s word. Just as the prophets patiently endured, they should too. The prophets suffered the evils of this world, and they chose to patiently endure. As God is the perfect example of patient endurance, so the prophets are examples of human patient endurance as godly obedience.

The prophets spoke God’s word to His people and to the nations. In their obedient service to God, they suffered at the hands of those who heard them. The early church experiencing the trials and tribulations should take solace that they are alone, the prophets that went before them experienced the same.

v. 11: **Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast...** James calls his audience to adopt a prophetic model for life. Why? Because those who endure, persevere in the face of trials, are blessed. James uses the word for speaking blessing here, only seen in one other location in the New Testament: the song of his mother Mary (Luke 1.48). For Mary, the generations to come would rise up and call her blessed because of the great things God would do through her life. Likewise, James states that we all bless those who remain steadfast. In the same way, he is echoing the meaning of his older brother’s message in Jesus’ sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you,” (Matthew 5.11-12).

**You have heard of the steadfastness of Job...** James the preacher provides his Jewish audience with another great example from their canon of faith: Job. James calls them to take Job as their example, a living model of how to suffer and endure through distressing hardships. Job, seen in the full context of his story, was a fully human example, not perfect and not always perfectly patient in the face of trials, but enduring and hungry for justification. Job struggled under the weight of the trials in his life and the spiritual beatings he suffered at the hands of his friends. Job was not silent or passive in his suffering. He demanded answers and questioned the purpose of his pain, but through it all, he endured.

**you have seen the purpose of the Lord...** This phrase sits strategically in the center of this verse. James has called his listeners to consider how those who hold on are blessed. You don't have to be divine to endure, the very human example of Job is a call to hold on in the heart of difficulties. God is not looking for perfection; that is impossible for us. God, rather, is calling us to endurance of Job, the grit and grip of one who holds on no matter what may come. How then, can we hope to hold on (like the proverbial kitten hanging onto the wire)? By remembering the end. God's purpose is seen at the end of our story, just as it was seen at the end of Job's story. Followers of Jesus should not let go in the middle when the waves are at their highest, and hope seems lost. We should hold on believing that God's purpose will meet us at the end, the "outcome toward the Lord was working throughout the trials" (Munn). With this established, James will remind us that in the midst of our suffering—even if our suffering equals that of Job—to remember the nature of God. God is exceedingly compassionate.

**how the Lord is compassionate and merciful...** James here uses two synonyms, both implying compassion in nuanced ways. The first term is *polusplagchnos*, only found here in the New Testament meaning super compassion describing God as extremely compassionate. James' words are visible throughout Scripture. Moses teaches that the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love (Exodus 34.6). It is God's super compassion that takes precedent over his anger. David centuries later would put Moses' words to song (Psalm 103.8). The prophet Joel would call God's people to repentance, remembering the incredible compassion of God ready to relent (Joel 2.13). God's extreme compassion was at the heart of Jonah's disobedience and failed attempt to run away from Nineveh. Jonah despised the people of Nineveh so much that he would rather die than go and tell them of God's coming judgment knowing that they would repent and God's compassion would rescue them from destruction (Jonah 4.2).

The second term is *oiktirmón*, occurs in the New Testament once here and twice by Luke in a single verse (Luke 6.36). This word describes the deeply-felt emotion of compassion, the visceral feeling rather than the intellectual ascent of compassion. Luke tells us that Jesus calls us to feel deep compassion for others just as God the Father has felt deep compassion for us.

v. 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...** James, like Jesus, calls Christians to be people who “mean what they say and say what they mean all the time without duplicity or deception or outright falsehood,” (Witherington). At the time of his writing, many people swore by heaven or by God, as a legal verification that what they were saying is true. This is still frequently used in many cultures around the world. In speaking like this, one weakens the sincerity of regular human speech. Honest Christians should not model their speech after others, but instead let the sincerity of their words stand on their own.

Although there is no apparent connection with the previous section and this admonition, there is one possible interpretation that could be helpful for us as we seek to understand and apply James’ words to our lives. In a way, according to Abigail Pelham, the book of Job is a treatise on the power or powerlessness of oaths. When Job was wealthy and well-established, his words carried weight. There was an implication that his wealth and position were affirmations of his righteous standing before God. However, when he is left in the dirt, dressed in rags and covered in disease, his claims of righteousness are met with disbelief and scoffing from his closest friends! Even Job’s wife, broken beneath the intense emotional strain, demands he give up his claims of innocence and his integrity (it has been argued that from the perspective of Job’s wife that she believed their current state of suffering was due to Job’s unconfessed sin). One can sympathize with her as she is looking for relief from the excruciating pain they were experiencing. In this way, the honorable thing would be for Job to fall on his knees, curse God and die, and thereby bring relief to her crippled existence (Job 2.9). Job, however, remained steadfast. It could be said he models his yes as yes and no as no.

Elihu, in a sense, takes an oath saying that God repays everyone for what they have done and brings on them what their conduct deserves (Job 34.10b-11). By this, he is swearing by God that Job is lying. He is not innocent. His state of poverty and devastation prove his lack of integrity. God Himself rebukes the friends of Job for misrepresenting Him and his character (Job 42.7b). According to James, then, Elihu “falls under condemnation.” Job, however, does not as he maintained his integrity through his steadfastness. Is this not what James had in mind when he calls the Messianic believers to not make oaths but instead to stand on the simplicity of one’s enduring faith?

v. 13: **Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray...** Therefore, in the face of hardship, trusting in the wisdom of God, Christians should “let perseverance finish its work” (James 1.4-5). They should lean, not on their own understanding or the misguided ‘wisdom’ of others, but on the God-given confidence that comes from fully trusting the Lord (Proverbs 3.5-6).

There will always be suffering in the Church. At any given moment, there will be someone walking through a difficult season. James uses the singular here with

intention. He calls the gathered believers to be aware of the individuals that make up the whole. The members of each congregation should be well aware of the suffering and the needs that are represented in their midst. The suffering individual should not feel alone and isolated or abandoned to suffer in silence. Instead, they should be invited to pray, they should be encouraged in the fellowship of believers to cry out to the Lord (Psalm 77).

The gospel of Mark records an excellent story that illustrates this point well (Mark 10.46-52). While Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, surrounded by a large crowd of people, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus began crying out for mercy. Bartimaeus was suffering in his physical and socioeconomic condition. He needed Jesus, and so he cried out his prayer for mercy. Instead of being applauded and helped, the crowd rebuked him, insensitive to his pain and annoyed by his desperation. And yet, in his extreme poverty and physical blindness, his prayer reveals a profound truth: he sees Jesus with blind eyes better than those who walk next to him. Bartimaeus recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

**Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise...** Surely, after meeting with Jesus, Bartimaeus moved from the first half to the second half of this verse! He followed Jesus. The word translated here as “cheerful” encompasses enthusiasm, courage and confidence (McKnight). This verse parallels the disposition Paul charges Christians to have (Romans 12.15; 1 Corinthians 12.26). Weep with those who are weeping, but also rejoice with those who rejoicing. Even while there will always be suffering in the lives of God’s people, there will always be celebration in the Church as well. Just as we give a special place in our fellowship for those suffering to seek after God, we should also create space for our brothers and sisters to rejoice in the goodness of God.

Thursday, August 5.....James 5.14-18

## **A Rainstorm of Healing**

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.



## • PRAYER POINT •

### How a Person Responds to Sickness

- Don't carry the weight of sickness alone.
- It is not uncommon for a person who is sick or has an injury to seek medical help. At the least, if someone injures their hand, they will lift their arm and turn their face toward the pain. This is no different for the Church, which functions like a body. If a member is sick, those around her should lift her up before Jesus, asking those mature believers in the church to pray with her believing that Jesus, the head, will turn and have compassion.
- Are you sick today? Don't carry that burden alone or try to hide it from your brothers and sisters in Christ. Together go to the spiritually mature leaders in your church to intercede with you. Or, if you are unable to make your way to the elders, request that they come to you.
- Do you know someone who is sick? Help lift their burden. Pray for them and make this illness known to the pastors and elders of the church.



## COMMENTARY

v. 14: **Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church...** James adds a third question to the self-reflective conclusion he is leading each congregation through with his message: First, is there anyone who is suffering? Second, is there anyone of good cheer? Third, is there anyone sick among you? For the suffering, they are encouraged to pray, to trade their current view for God's view. For the cheerful, they should praise God, to sing and compose songs of worship. These are two realities always present in the fellowship of Christians. What then should the third individual who is sick do? 0

The first observation is that the sick person is not well enough to come to where the Christians are assembled. His sickness is so severe that rather than coming to the elders, the elders must be called to come to him. Those who are responsible for the spiritual stewardship of the local church, including that of the sick individual, should go to intercede for him. Luke provides us with excellent examples for both the sick and the visiting elder in Acts 9.32-41. Peter traveled throughout Judea and Samaria. As he came alongside the groups of scattered believers, he heard of the affliction of Aeneas and the recent death of Tabitha. As a spiritual elder in the church, Peter prayed believing that God would heal Aeneas and resurrect Tabitha. In both situations, we see that Peter moved toward them, not the other way around. Peter, like the elders of every local church, should see themselves as shepherds responsible for their congregation," (Reicke).

**let [the elders] pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...** The elders are called upon to pray over the sick person. James tells the elders to anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord. There have been many different perspectives on the purpose and meaning for the use of the oil by the elders: whether the oil is used in a medicinal capacity (like the oil used in the parable the Good Samaritan, Luke 10.34) or symbolically used in a sacred ritual. Solomon Andria eloquently says, "When a member is sick, the whole body is concerned. In other words, the church is a place of healing for the sick. But it is neither the oil nor the elders that heal, but it is the Lord Himself since the anointing is done in his name." In this sense, the anointing with oil is a symbol of the consecration and purification of the sick person, an outward expression of the inward prayer of faith.

v. 15: **And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up...** The prayer of faith is a prayer of a single-minded person. This verse stands in direct contrast to those who ask but are left unanswered because their request is plagued with double-mindedness or ulterior motivations (James 1.6-8; 4.3). The prayer of faith is one of singular trust in God. It is a prayer that is aligned to the will of God, trusting in His divine intervention.

God is encouraging us to pray boldly, putting our trust fully in Him, believing that He will work in and through us. In this way, the prayer of the elders is rooted in the character of God.

**And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven...** There are times when sickness is a result of sin in the life of the believer, but it should not be an assumption made by the elders or members of the congregation (as seen in the life of Job, see also John 9.2-3). Only if the Spirit directs the elder specifically to note a shared connection, then as the elders pray for healing from sickness, they should also pray forgiveness of sins over the life of the afflicted (Mark 2.5; John 5.14).

Scot McKnight takes a fascinating perspective when he writes: “James combines the sick person’s requesting the elders—a sign in and of itself of need and faith in Christ—the elders’ prayer and anointing, the prayer of faith, and, as the next verse will clarify, confession of sin. This leads to the sick person’s forgiveness, itself sometimes a trigger of healing (Mark 2.5; Matt 8.16–17), and healing, itself an indication of forgiveness.”

v. 16: **Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed...** James makes an imperative command in the present tense. Followers of Jesus should take an active stance in confession. The more they institute confession as a pillar in their faith, they will find that “confession is good for the soul.”

Followers of Jesus, and the Church as a whole, will find healing together as they create safe spaces where vulnerability needed for confession is protected in sincerity and preserved in trust. Vulnerability opens the closed-off life that guards its wounded areas. Trust drives out the alienating force of isolation.

Although not limited to those sins directly addressed already in his message, James provided his audience with many areas where public confession would bring health, restitution and restoration: mistreatment of the poor, bitter jealousies, mercenary ambitions, contention and unresolved conflict (McKnight).

Confessing to one another will prompt a deeper drive to intercede for one another, too. This vulnerability well-stewarded will reap benefits of intimacy and healing.

**The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working...** The phrase is not easily translated and benefits from deeper exploration. James states earlier that Abraham’s faith worked together with his works (2.22). Here the implication is that God’s work is at work in the prayer of the righteous. One way of translating this phrase would be: “In many ways, a prayer of a righteous person is strong, when exercised.” Drawing closer to God and one another, putting our faith into practice lends deeper strength to our prayer because we are relying more and more on God.

v. 17: **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...** As one last illustrative example from the story of God’s people, James chooses Elijah the prophet. Elijah was the

personification of the Old Testament prophets, just as Moses was the personification of the law. This is why Moses and Elijah are the ones who meet Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Mark 9.2-13). Peter, John and his brother James saw Jesus transfigured and meeting with these two great heroes of the faith. With this in mind, it is important for James to remind his audience that Elijah was human just like them.

The phrase “with a nature like ours” implies the shared experiences that Elijah went through that are similar to those in the Church. Elijah suffered. He found himself at odds with the rich and powerful. He went through bouts of depression and emotional exhaustion (1 Kings 19).

**he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth...**Elijah waited in holy anticipation for the fulfillment of his prayer. James here says that after Elijah’s prayer to shut the rain out from Israel, it did not rain for 3 and a half years (1 Kings 17.1). Bo Reicke notes that this may have special importance “since it is exactly half of a seven-year period...a concept characteristic of Jewish eschatology (Daniel 9.27; Revelations 11.2f).” The timeframe provided should then be understood as “a period of waiting for the final manifestation of God’s grace” (Reicke).

**v. 18: Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit...** What does Elijah’s intercessory authority to shut the rain out from the land for 3.5 years have to do with prayers for divine healing in the church? It is found in the second Elijah prayer where he prayed again and the rain returned and produced a harvest (1 Kings 18.41-45). The sick in the church are like the stricken land, the body like a world of famine and drought. Just as Elijah prophesied in prayer believing the rain was coming to restore the land of Israel, so the elders of the church can prophetically pray divine healing on the sick, believing for a miracle.

Friday, August 6.....James 5.19-20

## How to Love the One

<sup>19</sup> My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, <sup>20</sup> 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.



## • PRAYER POINT •

### LEADING BACK THE ONE

- Today, embrace the closing call of James and Jude, the brothers of Jesus to love the wandering back to Jesus.
- Who is the one that you know has wandered away from the ninety-nine?
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can love \_\_\_\_\_ today, covering over their sin with mercy and grace, calling them back into relationship.
- How is God refreshing your faith by showing you the joy of sharing it with others?

## COMMENTARY

v. 19-20: **My brothers**...One last time James reminds his listeners they are spiritual siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ before God their Father. This family link has one more important implication: spiritual runaways.

**if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death**...The people of the church must take responsibility for those who drift away from the fellowship. They cannot absolve themselves of those they've brought into the Church, as if they were saying, "I brought them in, but that is where my responsibilities end. It is not my job to continue representing the good news of Jesus in their lives now that they've chosen to walk away from the Church."

Both James and his brother Jude stress this point (Jude 22-23). These lost brothers wandering away from the faith must be snatched back from the fire of hell, being merciful toward them in their doubts. Matthew tells the story of the most sheep with a different emphasis than Luke. In his telling, as our Zambian brother Joe Kapolyo reflects on it, "Matthew emphasizes the concern that none of the vulnerable members should be lost."

Kapolyo continues, "The Father's pastoral heart not only seeks and restores, but also rejoices when straying sheep are safely restored to the fold." It should be seen that this was once where James and Jude lived. They doubted the claims of their half-brother Jesus. Jesus Himself, however, never let them go. This call to show mercy toward His doubting brothers was so personal for James and Jude because it was their lived experience. Jesus saved their souls from death and covered all their sins in His grace and mercy.

Put another way, for James and Jude to reject the claim of the resurrected Jesus, the risen Christ they had seen with their own eyes, would have been tantamount to apostasy. This is not what Jesus wanted for His brothers, so he went to them just as he went to His disciples.

**and will cover a multitude of sins**...When we seek out those who have lost their way from the good news of Jesus Christ, and they are restored to right relationship with God and His people whose sins are covered over. The word here is like a veil that hides something from sight. It is like Proverbs 10.12: "Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs." The Apostle Peter echoes these words when he writes "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4.8). That love drives us out to find those people beloved by God – His image bearers lost in spiritual darkness – and covers over their sin. We begin to see people as God sees

them, worthy of love because they were made with love, they were made for love. They were made to know God and be known by God. They were made for family.

In our day and age, it is far too easy for us to cancel one another, to ghost those who have offended us. This does not mean there are not consequences for actions, but it does mean that we must strive to see the world like Jesus.



## **CONCLUDING NOTE:**

This conclusion to his message is not an abrupt ending to a loose jumble of thoughts. James has articulately and carefully crafted his message to the dispersed Messianic churches across the Roman Empire.

James ends his message with a climax. He has established a way of life that is better, rooted in the generous wisdom of God where people are not dehumanized because of poverty or socio-economics. Like Jesus, all believers are called to know God and represent Him to others. He has led them to the altar for all who are meek enough to seek repentance. He has rebuked those who manipulate and abuse others to amass personal wealth. Here at the close, he makes an appeal from personal experience: Be like Jesus Christ. Everyone in his audience knew that James was the little brother of Jesus. Could they hear the term of endearment “brother” on the lips of Jesus like James did? Could they sense the deep appeal to patiently and mercifully bring back those who were wandering away from Jesus?