

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JANUARY 7TH-8TH, 2023 // BOOK OF JAMES

## WEALTH AND GREED (JAMES 5:1-6)

James has just instructed us on our need for dependence on God (4:14-15).

- One of the greatest obstacles in relying on God is our tendency instead to rely on our money for security and strength.
- James never says it's a sin to be rich—Jesus had followers with money (Joseph of Arimathea, Zacchaeus), but the Bible is very clear that having money comes with great spiritual danger.

## JESUS SAID THAT IT'S DIFFICULT FOR RICH PEOPLE TO GET INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD (MATTHEW 19:23-24).

1. When we're doing well financially and have our needs met, it's harder for us to see how much we need God.
2. Riches give the illusion of safety and security.
3. The pursuit of riches motivates human beings to engage in and justify every wicked and deplorable sin imaginable (1 Timothy 6:10).

The "rich" James is writing to are those who have gained their wealth through wickedness.

- They had "held back wages" (vs. 4) from workers and had not paid them for their labor.
- They had used their wealth to gain power (political or societal influence) and more wealth, which they then used to oppress, condemn (probably in a legal sense), and even murder (vs. 6).

The "rich" James is writing to also used their wealth in wicked ways.

- They "stored it up" (vs. 3), they kept others from benefitting from it (vs. 4), and they lived in extravagance and luxury (vs. 5).
- They thought they had "made it" because of their wealth: but God thought otherwise. God's judgment is upon those who misuse riches.

God's present judgment on those who misuse riches is that their earthly riches decay and their character erodes (vs. 2-3).

- Everything we own will someday end up in a landfill: it's just stuff.
- It's not wrong to have stuff, but if having stuff becomes more important than caring for and loving people, that stuff will start to rot and corrode our very souls (vs. 3).

Some of the nastiest, meanest, unhappiest, most soulless human beings are people with lots of money who have made that money their god.

- Not only is there a present judgment for those who make money their god, but there is also a future judgment coming.
- A person living luxuriously on sinfully gained and misused wealth is simply someone fattening themselves for the day of slaughter (vs. 5).

## HOW DO I MAKE SURE I DON'T MISUSE RICHES?

1. Know that you are a steward: you don't own ANYTHING (1 Chronicles 29:12).
2. Be honest, just, and fair in your business and finance practices (Deuteronomy 24:14-15).
3. Be generous and give (10% to God via the tithe, and then whatever else you can to the needy).
4. Choose contentment and gratitude over "retail therapy" (minimalism and "shopping freezes" are good for your soul! [1 Timothy 6:6]).

## PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE (JAMES 5:7-12)

These believers were "dispersed" because of persecution (1:1) and were now most likely facing exploitation and persecution from the rich.

- Life sometimes doesn't seem fair at all.
- James gives these believers encouragement that God is fighting their battles for them and sees them in their trials.
- In persecution and trials, Christians should show patience and trust in the Lord (vs.7-8).

Tials and afflictions often produce in us grumbling or complaints. James prohibits this response and urges us to "be patient."

- We're encouraged to be patient and to develop stamina by looking to the coming of the Lord.
- This world is messed up! But when Jesus comes back, He'll set all things right.
- Instead of us taking vengeance into our hands, we're to trust God to perform justice.

Like a farmer, we must be patient and do only what we can do while we wait and rely on God to provide the rain and sun (vs. 7-8).

- In our trials, sufferings, and waiting, we're not to complain about each other either (vs. 9).
- Criticizing and fault-finding others is sometimes our default response in hardship and pain. James says God will judge "complainers."

## "THE JUDGE STANDS AT THE DOOR..."

When life doesn't seem fair, and our suffering seems unbearable, we can take great comfort in the fact that Jesus is returning soon.

- How soon? Soon. We don't know when exactly, but the world is groaning in labor pains (Matthew 24:8; Romans 8:22).
- We are called to patiently endure as we await His coming.

The OT prophets and Job exemplified patience in suffering by not complaining or turning away from God even during the most painful times (vs. 10).

- We're to imitate behavior like this—because when we do, we're blessed (vs. 11).
- When we choose to trust in God and be patient, we experience more of the Lord's compassion and mercy.

James then speaks of not swearing or taking an oath (vs. 12; Matthew 5:33-37).

- This is a warning against the use of a hasty, irreverent oath involving God's name ("heaven") during a time of suffering or hardship.
- When we're in a season of suffering, we can easily be tempted to make empty promises or frivolous appeals to God's name to bargain our way out of trouble or difficulty.

We are to simply let our "yes" be "yes," and our "no" be "no."

- Our integrity and our character shouldn't waver even if we're going through hard seasons.
- We're to be honest people who simply do what we say and follow through on our commitments.
- Our lack of character and frivolous speech will be exposed at the judgment seat of Christ.

### **PRAYER (JAMES 5:13-20)**

All Christians know that we should pray, but we often don't know how, when, or take the time to develop the discipline and habits of daily prayer.

- Prayer is never to be practiced only when "we feel like it"—God's invitation isn't dependent on our own fickle emotions or moods.
- James invites us to pray in all of life's situations: bad times, good times, in sickness, in suffering, and for those who stray from the Lord.

### **PRAYER DURING SUFFERING (VS. 13A)**

- When we're suffering, sometimes prayer feels like the LAST thing we want to do.
- Sometimes suffering draws out of us complaints and self-pity: but Scripture invites us to cast all our cares on the Lord because He cares about all that we go through (1 Peter 5:7).
- Choosing prayer over anxiety/complaining during suffering is an exercise of faith.

### **PRAYER DURING TIMES OF BLESSING (VS. 13B)**

- For others of us, the reason we don't pray is because our life is going pretty good, and we don't want to "bother God."
- Feeling cheerful? Acknowledge the source of your joy by singing praise.
- In every season, whether you are suffering or life is good, the directive is still the same—TALK TO GOD in prayer.

### **PRAYER FOR HEALING (VS. 14-16A)**

When someone is seriously ill, what role should prayer play in their situation?

- Often fear, anxiety, and discouragement keep many people from doing much of anything.
- They should reach out and ask for prayer from their church, specifically from the leaders of the church ("elders").
- Those leaders are to pray and "anoint" with oil.

The word used for "anoint" in the Greek is usually used in a medicinal sense.

- Oil was seen as a means of cure for various diseases, wounds, bruises, and viruses.
- The "anointing with oil" can be interpreted two ways:
  1. Symbol of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.
  2. Seeking out the best medical attention possible.
- God can heal any way He chooses!

Some have wondered if James guarantees healing for the sick 100% of the time if a true prayer of faith is prayed for them, while others interpret this as a reference to ultimate resurrection.

- Some Believers are healed in this lifetime, while others receive their healing in the life to come.
- We are simply instructed to pray!

We're also instructed to seek out spiritual healing by confessing our sins to each other.

- There are some spiritual breakthroughs that can only happen in our lives through confessing our sins to other believers and having them pray for us.
- Confession breaks the power of secret sin! It should be done wisely and discretely.

### **THE POWER OF PRAYER (VS. 16B-18)**

James mentions the OT prophet Elijah.

- Elijah being a "human being" means he had temptations, struggles, and inconsistencies.
- This power of prayer doesn't just work with super Christians. This is for real people!
- Faith isn't about us focusing on the sufficiency of our faith but rather the sufficiency and power of God.

Elijah was praying according to something God had already said would happen (2 Chronicles 7:13).

- Because He knew what God had already said, He earnestly prayed for God to move in accordance with God's will.
- The example of Elijah is an example of courageous, bold prayer that trusts in the will and power of God.

### **PRAYER FOR THE PRODIGAL (VS. 19-20)**

Sometimes people stray from their faith because their profession in Christ was never real in the first place, but other times genuine Believers stray from their faith.

- We're called to turn them back from the error of their ways: this happens through prayer and through lovingly speaking truth.
- We can't give up on people too easily!

### **TO THOSE WHO WRESTLE WITH GREED AND STRUGGLE WITH BEING GENEROUS... (VS. 1-6)**

- You've been blessed by God so that you might be a blessing to others.
- Your money, stuff, comfort, and entertainment won't ever satisfy you: in fact, they will corrode your soul if you make them your "gods."
- Be honest and just, be generous and giving, and be content and grateful.

### **TO THE DISCOURAGED, DISILLUSIONED, AND JADED... (VS. 7-12)**

- Sometimes it seems like there is no justice or fairness happening in our world.
- God is fighting our battles for us, and someday all things will be made right.
- We're not to complain or seek others to blame for our pain. Our job is to simply do good, be patient, and trust in the Lord.

### **TO THOSE OF US WHO STRUGGLE WITH PRAYER...(VS. 13-20)**

- Pray at all times: during seasons of suffering and seasons of blessing.
- If you are sick and need healing, get prayer from your church leaders AND seek medical care.
- If you're struggling with sin: confess it to another Believer and get prayer.
- Big prayers that God answers in big ways are not just for "Super-Christians."
- Elijah was a man just like you and me. Pray with faith and persistence!
- If you know someone "straying," don't give up on them. Pray for them and keep speaking truth as God gives you the opportunity.