

James 4:13–5:6

Introduction

Has anyone ever watched a debate between two people and seen one of the debaters change their mind?

It never happens does it? You typically see two men get up in front of a crowd and argue with each other for half an hour and neither person is able to convince the other person to change their position.

It is a presidential election year and historically presidential candidates will debate one another. Wouldn't it be wild if Donald Trump and Joe Biden began debating and after the debate Biden announced that he's been convinced by Trump in the debate and he's ending his campaign in order to vote for Trump?!?

The reason neither person changes their mind in the debate is because debates aren't primarily *for* the two people debating. Debates are *for* the audience.

Perhaps you have been mulling over a certain theological issue (Calvinism vs. Arminianism, infant baptism vs. credo baptism, etc.). To help you sort through it you decide to watch a debate on the issue. You don't expect either of them to change *their minds* but you may change *your mind*!

The speakers in a debate aren't addressing *you*, they are addressing *each other*. But even though that is the case, the debate is *for you*.

There is something similar going on in our sermon text this morning. At the end of [James 4](#) and the beginning of [James 5](#), James takes a break in addressing the young church that he is writing to. Instead, James addresses those who are persecuting the church.

In these verses, James takes on the role of a prophet denouncing the wicked. But even though these words aren't *directly* addressed to James' audience, they are certainly *for* James' audience.

By taking on this prophetic role, James communicates two things to his audience:

1. Jesus will triumph over the enemies of the church.
2. Make sure you aren't becoming an enemy of the church.

Jesus Will Triumph Over the Enemies of the Church

Setup

The final verses of [James 4](#) are something of a parable. James writes of someone who is going to go and do some business in “***such and such a town***” and warns that this person is arrogant because they “***do not know what tomorrow will bring.***”

But instead of living in humility and saying, ***If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that*** they ***boast in their arrogance*** and ***fail to do what is right even though they know the right they should be doing.***

Business Parables

It shouldn't surprise us that this is a parable because so many of Jesus' parables use the language of “business” or “trade”.

In [Matt 18](#), Jesus gives a parable that compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. In [Matt 20](#), Jesus gives the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard where a master hires laborers to work for him. In [Matt 21](#), Jesus gives the parable of the Tenants who are hired to watch over the master's vineyard. Finally, in [Matt 25](#), Jesus gives the parable of the Talents where a man going on a journey gives talents to his servants to invest while he is gone.

Both Jesus and James use the language of business to give parables about spiritual matters.

Purpose of Parables

Unfortunately, many Christians have been taught poorly about the parables of the Bible. If you go out and ask a Christian why Jesus taught in parables you might be told, “Jesus taught in parables so that his audience could easily understand his teachings.”

But when you read through the gospels, the opposite is true. Not only the crowds, but even Jesus' disciples didn't understand most of the parables. Jesus' disciples regularly came to Jesus after he taught in parables asking him to explain them.

This is actually a *feature* of parables. The Bible teaches that parables exist to hide and conceal truth as much as they reveal things.

In all the the parables I just mentioned, Jesus speaks in judgement against the wicked leadership in Jerusalem. The parables stand as a prophetic judgement against the enemies of God.

James' Parable

This is also how James' parable works

The arrogant businessmen in this parable are the persecutors from Jerusalem. Their "business" is going out to persecute the young scattered church. They are arrogant and boastful in their oppression.

James' parable, like Jesus', serves as a warning to the persecutors and as a reminder to the young church that Jesus will triumph over the enemies of the church.

Chapter 5 Setup

This theme of Jesus' victory over the church's enemies continues into chapter 5.

Like the prophets of old James condemns the rich and powerful. He calls them to **weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them**. James states that their **riches have rotted and their garments are moth eaten. Their gold and silver are corroded and this corrosion will be evidence against them**.

Much of the language that James uses in these verses echoes that of the prophet Isaiah.

Speaking For the Church

In the early chapters of his prophecy, Isaiah's gives prophecies about the nations surrounding Israel. There are prophecies about Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Egypt, and several others.

Why does Isaiah give these prophecies against nations that may not ever hear them? Just like the men on the debate stage, Isaiah's prophecies were not to Israel but they were for Israel.

In Isaiah's day and in James' day, God's people were suffering under oppressive forces arrayed against them. The prophetic denunciations of Isaiah against the nations gave hope to God's people that God was not abandoning them.

James' prophetic denunciation of the persecutors from Jerusalem serves the same purpose. James declares their downfall to encourage his audience that God has not forgotten His church. God sees their suffering and God will vindicate His people in the end.

Application for the Church

In [James 5:4-6](#) writes, "**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. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.**"

As a prophet, James pronounces judgement on the wicked persecutors of the church just like Jesus in his parables.

We live in an age of relative ease in the church. But things have shifted in America over the past ten years. The cultural pressures against the church have grown and look to continue.

God's people are called to remember that God is just. God is not surprised at the oppression of the wicked against His people. Remember, Jesus experienced the oppression of the wicked in His earthly ministry.

Whenever you suffer persecution for the sake of Christ you can be encouraged by two things: (1) you are walking in the path of Jesus. (2) God will ultimately defeat the wicked.

The wicked will either bow the knee to Jesus in repentance or they will be judged for their sin by Jesus.

Make Sure You Are Not Becoming an Enemy of the Church

But this leads us the main point of application from this parable and prophetic warning. Which is to make sure you aren't becoming an enemy of the church.

Throughout his letter, James has warned his audience of the foolishness of trying to “fight fire with fire.” Throughout the letter James has written against the temptation to respond in angry rhetoric and violence against their persecutors.

Instead, James has encouraged the young church to “Count it all joy” in the midst of their suffering because God has ordained it to grow them in their faith and bring them to maturity.

The strong words that James uses in these verses against the persecutors of the church also serve as a warning to James' audience. James is making it clear. These arrogant and boastful persecutors are doomed to fall under God's judgement if they don't repent.

But the same would also be true of James' audience if they continued in their foolish mimicking of their persecutors.

This same warning applies to you this morning as well. As the wicked arrogantly world around you boasts against the church, you may be tempted to respond in the power of the flesh. Remember what James has written earlier. To respond in these ways is, worldly, unspiritual, and demonic.

The path of Jesus is the path of victory. But it is the path of victory that leads through the cross and the tomb. The pattern of the Christian life is a cruciform pattern. We conquer by laying down our lives. We cast down strongholds but the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

So when you are tempted to “fight fire with fire” remember that Jesus calls you to take up your cross and follow him.

If you have fallen in this regard. If you have followed the ways of the world to try and combat the world. Remember, Jesus took up his cross for you. Your sins are forgiven because of his death and resurrection.

Turn from your sins and turn to Christ and be made whole.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!