

James Series - Chapter 5

Possessions, Perseverance and Prayer

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Good morning church. I am excited to be here with you as we close out this sermon series from the Letter of James.

When Lester asked if I would be willing to share this morning from James, I said, "sure!" He said, "great, we would like you to use James chapter 5 as the text."

Have you ever volunteered for something without really knowing what you were volunteering for? I'll explain in a minute.

I really like the book of James. I'd probably get along pretty well with James because of his no-nonsense, straight to the point kind of approach. James can feel as though he is in your face sometimes, maybe even feel a bit like a punch to the gut and - fair warning - the opening section in today's chapter is no different.

There is so much to chapter 5 that I believe it really could be broken down into three full sermons, so we're going to be moving quickly through it this morning. Here's the direction we're going...

James starts off by giving a stern warning to the rich (Remember, I volunteered before knowing what I was getting into?) but then he switches his message to the people who are suffering and closes the letter by encouraging believers to pray in every circumstance and to hold each other accountable.

So that's the path we're heading down, and we have a lot to cover, so if you have your bibles, open up to James chapter 5 and let's dig into God's word this morning. James Chapter 5.

Warning to Rich Oppressors

Now listen, you rich people...

Let's stop right there and talk about this for just a moment. I'm guessing $\frac{1}{3}$ of you just started sweating and squirming in your seats, while another $\frac{1}{3}$ isn't quite sure where you fall into this equation of being rich and the last $\frac{1}{3}$ are wiping your brow saying "Whew, he's not talking to me."

So, as a reality check for all of us, I want to give you a few statistics and share a personal story.

Now if you follow Dave Ramsey, you probably know that he says there are two types of people: free spirits and nerds. If you call yourself a free spirit, like my wife does, your eyes may have just started to glaze over as soon as you heard the word "statistics" - but for the nerds like me, we've already pulled out our calculators. So free spirits... stick with me for just one minute and I'll get to story time.

According to the U.S. Government Department of Health and Human Services the U.S. income poverty line for a single person is \$12,760 per year. This is a person who is living on their own, paying their own

rent & utilities, buying their own groceries, etc... This works out to be around \$1063/month or \$245/week or roughly \$49 a day.

Meanwhile the World Poverty Line in 2020, according to World Vision, is \$1.90 per day. Perspective is everything when we talk about wealth.

Okay free spirits - statistics are over now. Hopefully that wasn't too painful - now it's on to a story.

I experienced a perspective switch regarding wealth when I was a teenager. I remember having the world by the tail, my life ahead of me. I drove a 1968 Ford Mustang - let me tell you, that's a fun car for a teenage boy (so much fun that I owned it for only 15 minutes before being pulled over) - so I owned the mustang and a motorcycle. I had a roof over my head, a bed to sleep on and food on the table. I had a job, close friends, close family, a close-knit youth group... life was good! I just didn't know how good I had it until I went on a mission trip to Guatemala.

I remember being in a compound that housed a feeding program for children. Chain-linked fence around the perimeter with razor wire around the top. You've probably all seen the commercials about sponsoring children; well, the children who had sponsors could come into the fence and then into the building and get a meal (chicken/rice and beans/corn tortilla), they would hear bible stories and play games.

I was serving food inside of the building and after all the children were served, the volunteers could get their food. I had no idea what was happening outside of the building but when I got my food and stepped outside to eat, that is when my perspective changed forever.

Brothers and Sisters - when you see children standing outside of the fence, clutching the fence - starving and staring at you - your perspective on wealth will change. I remember asking one of the leaders of the program to bring a child inside and saying to him that, "I do not need to eat, this can feed one of those children," and being told that is not allowed, and he explained how and why the program works so well with sponsorships. Needless to say, I didn't eat much that day.

And that is just one of many, many stories that I could share about my time in Guatemala and how it really shifted my perspective of wealth and poverty and generosity. If you've ever spent time in a country like that you probably understand what I'm saying, and if you have not, I'd encourage you to go... it can be life changing.

But let's get back to the text. What we're going to find as we continue reading is that James really isn't talking about how much money we have... and he is not decrying wealth, in fact in just a little while we are going to read where James references Job as an example... and Job was a very wealthy man!

What James is about to do here is dig and pry into a heart issue that was happening in his day and is most certainly happening today too - he is talking about the heart issue of materialism and hoarding wealth while brothers and sisters are going without basic needs and are even possibly dying.

Let's keep reading...

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The

wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you. (James 5: 1-6)

The bible is not afraid to address heart issues, especially in the area of money, and here we find ourselves faced with another passage that discusses the very thing that we are often reluctant to discuss; and, since I volunteered for this... let's talk about it... point #1

1. We need to have healthy boundaries around our hearts and a healthy perspective of wealth.

Money and materials (or possessions) can be a blessing from God when the resources are managed wisely. To be clear, the bible does not condemn wealth.

We can find examples that show us that it is possible to be a faithful Christian and enjoy the blessings that God has given us - while at the same time not holding on too tightly to the temporary things of this world, but instead having open hands to help others and to give generously. Sometime this week read Acts 4:32-37 where you'll find the account of Joseph called Barnabas who sold some of his land to help those in need.

The problem becomes, as James stresses, when our wealth becomes our sense of safety. When our own financial security becomes of greater importance to us than the well-being of our brothers and sisters. Remember back in Chapter 2 when James said:

"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" James 2:15-16

He is really circling back to what he was saying in Chapter 2, but with even a stronger warning here:

"...weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days." James 5:1-3

James is basically saying all of these things that we have been stockpiling and keeping for ourselves; these items that give us a false sense of safety and make us feel secure - they're all going to rot away someday - and they could have possibly been used to help someone else who was in need, but we were clutching onto them...and to our own detriment!

Just think about the things we buy, collect, and hold on to...

I often ask my wife, "how many pairs of shoes does one woman need?" (Husbands, eyes up here. Don't look over at your wife right now).

In all seriousness, just look around us, take inventory. We are a blessed community. But the question is this: In your heart and in my heart when the accumulation of wealth and the collection of possessions collides with God's words and warnings to us - who wins? Who wins? James is warning us here not to allow our goods to become our gods.

Jesus says it this way in Matthew 6:19-21...

“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. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

So here's a challenge to you and I know it sounds cliché but go home and pull out your bank statement or your checkbook register and take a look at where your money is being spent. Take inventory of where your “treasure” is because as Jesus states, “there your heart will be also.”

After evaluation of your treasure, if need be, consider reallocating some of it. Maybe to a Petra missionary, or increase your charitable giving in other ways...maybe start to give to a Christian mission's organization...one that cares for children's needs. Pray about it and follow the Lord's prompting.

Believe me, as I was preparing for this morning, I was doing a lot of searching in my own heart - and even some repenting too.

Alright, everyone take a deep breath, we got through the money section. Let's not forget about the warning of James and what we just heard, but we need to keep moving.

After warning the rich, James shifts his focus in chapter 5 to Patience in Suffering.

That leads us to point number 2:

2. We need to keep our focus on Christ, not on the crisis.

Let's continue reading...starting at verse 7...

Patience in Suffering

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! James 5:7-9

Remember who James was writing to? Jewish Christians who were dispersed because of persecution. Families, who for generations lived in the same place, had to leave everything they've ever known. Why? Because they put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a threat of being beaten, tortured, and possibly even killed - and what does James tell them? “Be patient...”

The patience that James is talking about is not sitting back and twiddle your thumbs while you're waiting for water to boil... nor is this the kind of patience you need to have while you're sitting in your car on a Sunday morning, possibly blowing the horn, while you're waiting for your family to come out of the house so that you can *hopefully* make it to church on time. (Wives, eyes up here. Don't look over at your husband right now).

The Greek word was translated to “patience”, but it is probably better translated: to persevere or to endure through our trials and suffering. But what are we being patient for? The Lord's coming.

It is interesting to note that in the few verses we just read, James points to the hope we have in our suffering when he says “until the Lord’s coming” or “The Lord’s coming is near” or the “Judge is at the door.” This has been the hope of all believers since Christ ascended to heaven.

Brothers and sisters - isn't that our hope too? When things around us seem out of control, when all hope seems lost, we tend to focus on the problems instead of focusing on the One who is coming again! And here we see James encouraging believers to keep their focus on the Lord and His return.

Continuing on in verse 10...

Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. James 5:10-11

To continue his point about remaining faithful in dire circumstances, James points us in the general direction of the Old Testament prophets, and then he directs our attention specifically on Job - to illustrate someone who kept his focus on the Lord in a time of suffering.

Let me give you some background info on Job. The bible describes him as being the “the greatest man among all of the people of the East.” He was wealthy, I’m talking, really, really wealthy. He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys and a large number of servants. In addition to that he also had 10 children (Seven sons and three daughters). So what happened?

Let’s read from Job chapter 1...

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.” “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” Job 1:6-11

For the sake of time, I’ll paraphrase the rest. The account continues that through a series of tragic events, Job loses everyone and everything. All of his children were killed, his servants were killed, raiding parties came and took his livestock, everything was gone. After Job heard the news about all of the losses, his response is powerful, and it shows us where his focus was...Job 1:20-21

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and *worshiped*. And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” Job 1:20-21 (ESV) (Italics added)

This man, Job, is who James directs our attention to as a man that persevered; his focus was not on the temporary things of this world.

To bring the story of Job full circle, through all of his trials and tribulations, he remained faithful to God, his focus remained on the One who could redeem and restore. In the end, the Lord was compassionate and merciful to Job and blessed him with more children and even more wealth than he had before.

I want to encourage you that in your own life, in whatever your circumstances are right now, keep your focus on Christ - not on the crisis. He is the only One who can rescue, redeem, and restore... He is the One who is coming again - Amen!

Continuing on in chapter 5...before we read it, I'd just want to say that I like to think about things in a logical progression. I will read, study and research the texts, try to understand them, and then hopefully present it in a way that has a flow to it; but James - not so much. James seems to throw a random thought in here when he writes...

Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned. James 5:12

James gets straight to the point here and to boil it down, he is saying... be truthful, if you say you'll do something... follow through and do it. If you have to put a qualifier in front of a statement, like TBH that's texting slang for "To be honest" does that mean that other times you're not honest? Or have you ever heard someone say, "I swear on the bible that I'm telling the truth."

James is telling us, there should be no need for us to do that...a simple "yes, I'm going to..." or "no, I'm not going to..." should suffice. The word condemned here, really could be translated to mean "judged" ... people will quickly realize if you are a truth-teller or not; and, they will quickly judge or decide if they can count on you. So be honest, be truthful and follow through on your commitments.

Moving into the homestretch, the last section of chapter 5, which also brings us to point #3...

3. We need to keep prayer and praise to God as our first reaction.

There is so much to unpack in this section. Let's continue reading starting in verse 13...

The Prayer of Faith

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:13-14

What a great reminder for all of us! In all of our circumstances... whether through trials, suffering, and sickness or in times of peace, prosperity, and health... our first reaction should be to pray or give praise to God!

But that is not always our default heart posture, is it? When we are sick, when things around us seem to be falling apart, we often try to find a solution right away. But James is reminding us here that our first response should be going to God in prayer. Psalm 55:22 says it this way...

Give your burdens to the LORD, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall. Psalm 55:22

Prayer and Praise are always a proper response to God.

Continuing in verse 15

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. James 5:15-18

These verses alone could be a sermon. Here we find James talking about prayer for the sick. In our modern language we read sick and might think of a common cold, or maybe a disease of some kind. But the word here can be translated to be spent, weary, wrung out, run down - similar to being tired to the point of being sick.

There are two ideas here that I think James is getting to. The first idea is that he understands the encouragement that can come from being prayed for. The encouragement that can come from knowing you are being supported by fellow believers who are standing with you in prayer and checking in on you when they know you're weary.

The second part is the confession. While one person might actually be physically sick, in someone else's life the stress and weariness and physical sickness could be from a sinful lifestyle that needs to be brought to light. So James is encouraging believers to deal with their sins by confessing, which can allow the healing to begin. Using this biblical principle is why programs like Celebrate Recovery, Cleansing Stream, Restoring the Foundation as well as professional counseling are so powerful and effective.

And we have reached the last section, the last two verses... and make no mistake, there is a lot here... this was not an afterthought, but a powerful reminder to us. Starting in verse 19...

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

No man or woman is an island. We need each other, we need to stay *actively* plugged into a bible believing local church. We need community for many reasons, and one of those reasons is to stay in-tune and involved with each other's lives - some may even call it accountability.

When a man or woman thinks they no longer need the body of Christ and they walk away thinking they can do it on their own, too often they are found following a strange new idea or concept that sounds spiritual, but isn't biblical and it pulls them away. They wander from the truth.

The author of Hebrews says it this way:

Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near. Hebrews 10:25 (TLB)

The interesting part that we see here in James is that he is not really addressing the one who strays, but he is really addressing those who sit on the sidelines watching it happen while thinking "it's none of my business." When in reality James is saying that it is our business. We can find examples of this throughout scripture.

One example of this is Paul addressing the Galatians (Galatians 1:6-9) where we see they were turning to a different gospel, following strange teachings that were distorting the truth and throwing the church into confusion. Paul warns the church to come back to the truth they first learned - He steps in and guides them back to the truth.

Brothers and sisters, when we see a fellow believer straying from the truth of the gospel, the most loving thing we can do is to say something. Step into their situation and walk with them and gently restore them back in the love of Christ. - Amen!

Would you stand with me?

That was a lot of scripture to chew on this morning...all in about 30 minutes. Everything from guarding our hearts against making our goods our god, to keeping our focus on Christ during times of suffering, to praying and praising in all circumstances, and finally confessing to each other and praying for one another and holding each other accountable. It was a lot to digest.

We are going to sing "Blessed be the name of the Lord" and then after the song, I will pray a blessing over you and then dismiss you, but now... Let's praise the Lord together for His goodness!

(Song)

(Release prayer ministers)

Every week, at the end of each service, there is a prayer ministry time that is offered. If you have never turned to the Lord Jesus for your salvation and surrendered your life to him, the prayer ministers would love to talk with you this morning about beginning a relationship with Jesus. Also, I would like to encourage you, if you are struggling this morning for any reason (physical, emotional, spiritual) allow one of the prayer ministers to pray with you and for you. Allow one of them to minister to you and encourage you. Brothers and sisters, you are not alone, we are all in this together. Let's Pray.