

## James 3:13-5:7 – Pastor Stephen – Aug 20<sup>th</sup> 2023

We're continuing in James, and we'll be looking at a large chunk, reading James 3:13-5:7. We are covering a lengthy section because I think it contains one over-arching message that can get muddled when you look at each of these smaller sections individually. Each of these sections could themselves be a full-length sermon, but in looking at them all together, we can study the macro-message that connects them all.

Pastor Vic will be back next week to pick up from 5:7 and take us through the rest of James.

Let's read James 3:13-5:7

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

4 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?

6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

### Pray

A couple weeks ago, I noted that a repeating theme in James is Heavenly v. earthly. We are going to examine how this theme continues in these passages.

There is a fantastic quote, unattributed, “as seal to ink, so is truth to reality”

As you can see from the image, the seal has many facets that are simply unable to transfer when dipped in ink and pressed on paper. The quote intends to convey that there is an ultimate truth and it is reflected in this reality, but not perfectly.

We get this concept all over scripture:

Hebrews 8:5, speaking about the tabernacle, says, “They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.”

Ephesians 5:32, speaking about marriage, says, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

1 Corinthians 13:12 says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

But all of these imply or explicitly state that we are in a realm that can only imperfectly reflect God’s eternal reality. That is why truth matters so much.

My view is subjective. I only see what I see, which is very little. And I direct what I see by looking where I want, so I’m even more biased by my own actions. If you take what everybody sees, all of reality, it’s still warped by sin and can be mis-explained or manipulated. Truth must have the right to over-ride what we think we experience, and what we see in reality. That’s why it’s so important that you have sources of truth you can totally trust.

Think of the seal as the eternal, and the ink as the world. The eternal axis exists, vertically, and the world axis exists horizontally. You could also think of it as spiritual vs. material or heavenly vs. civic.

If you carry this idea in your head as you’re reading through scripture and interacting with the world, it will greatly help you understand certain theological concepts that seem to be incongruent with our lives. For example, all people are equal before God, yet the old testament has different punishments for killing

different people. That's because on the eternal axis, all people are equal, but on the civic axis people are treated differently for all kinds of reasons. Age, intellect, looks, experience.

On the eternal axis, sin is sin. Every sin separates us from God. And Jesus, Paul, and James, clearly say that one sin makes us guilty of all. But on the civic axis we have dramatically different consequences for sin and we don't even prosecute some.

So these two axis exist and we are called, by nature of our birth and salvation, to exist on both, which means, necessarily, that we will exist on both imperfectly.

Peter says we are exiles on earth. Paul calls us ambassadors and says in Philippians 3:20 that our citizenship is in heaven, but

Hebrews 11:13-14 paints a more complete picture when it says,

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland."

It is this very dual state, this bifurcated existence that James is calling believers to struggle with, because it is a struggle, we all share, and one that will be with us until we are freed from this sin-cursed world.

James goes into detail on 4 examples showing us what happens when the eternal truth is divorced from earthly reality in our lives.

Notice as we go through them, how all of the earthly examples are self-promoting.

First we have the wisdom that is from above. VERSE 13 "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." What is this meekness of wisdom? Look at verse 17. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." Verse 18 says that the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. This word, "fruit" is the produce or what your actions produce. The fruit is righteousness.

We'll come back to this meekness of wisdom, because I think the following examples will illuminate what James is talking about.

The first contrast to that wisdom which is from above, the heavenly, is envy and self-seeking. Where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing exists. Confusion means a lack of a steady state. Some versions say disorder, but really the concept here is chaos. Along with the chaos comes every evil thing.

Jesus gives a beautiful picture of this idea in Matthew 7:24-27 where he talks about the wise man who hears the words of Jesus and does them. He is building on a rock. Meanwhile the foolish man hears the words and doesn't do them. He is like a man who builds his house on sand.

The rock is stable, unmovable. The storms come and the house built on the rock stands, but the sand is unstable, it washes out and changes, there is no steady state to sand when the storms come and the foolish man's house collapses.

So in this first example you can see how the person who is seeking his own advancement introduces instability and every evil thing.

And James next example is so similar that some of the words are interchangeable. Look at 4:1-10. Here you have the source of all murder and wars and strife. You want, you lust, you covet and can't obtain, so you take, you fight.

It starts when we're young. Anyone with kids knows what's going to happen in those first weeks after Christmas, when we've finished celebrating the birth of our Lord and savior it's as though we are a witness to the irony of the eternal vs. worldly. Jesus left his heavenly abode to come live a perfect life and die for us, giving up everything He had. And as soon as we're done celebrating that we get to see the strife of selfishness as our children begin fighting over their toys. The gifts that were given to them become a source of conflict, and why? Because they want and do not have.

But it doesn't get any better as we grow up. Throughout history we can trace conflict, from interpersonal all the way up to world wars, back to people's covetousness over relationships, social status, wealth, land, and much more.

We ask and do not have because even when we ask God, sometimes our lusts are at the heart of our desires.

This passage became a very useful arbitration tool in the Simons' household. Whenever one of our kids would come, crying or complaining that the other child did something or didn't do something, we would ask, "what was it you wanted and didn't get?" It was an amazing, repeated lesson, to the point that we would just begin the discussion by quoting the verse, "where do wars and fights come from among you?"

It really cut to the heart of the issue, because it's our self-focus that leads to all these problems.

What is the solution, according to James? Humility. But we'll come back to that, because James still has two more examples of the effect of living worldly lives.

Look at 4:11-12

*"Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law, But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?"*

The context of the previous verses should help us understand this passage better; selfish-ness verses selflessness. But James' word choice matters as well, because, while the word "judgment" may not be bad in every instance that it is used in the Bible, the word for "speak evil" is always bad. Some versions translate "speak evil" as slander and it comes from a compound Greek word that literally means "Talk Down."

James is not talking about people who are pointing out sin or even flaws. James is talking about people who are besmirching their brother's and sister's character, and possibly even claiming they are not believers. You get this distinction because he compares what they are doing to what only God can do.

*"There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy."*

We aren't supposed to judge what is hidden in another's heart. We can say someone did something wrong, but we should never say we "know" why.

Also, remember back in [James 2:12](#), "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty"? While you may be able to tell someone their actions are sinful, you can't judge their soul.

And in good James fashion he drives this point home when he says, "Who are you?"

So, it's clear that this behavior is wrong, but how does it fit into the context? Why would we besmirch or slander another person? Instead of addressing the issue, why would we attack the character?

I can turn a room against a person with the proper insult. I can elevate my status. . I've made them look worse and, which, in comparison, makes myself look better. For example: "I may not have an answer to your argument, but at least I'm not a jerk."

So this passage fits quite well, in context. Just like the previous two examples James is pointing out behavior that is antagonistic against others for personal gain. And he continues in his fourth example. But notice what is missing.

[Verse 13](#), "Come now, you who say, 'today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.'"

Here you have people discussing business and how to achieve personal gain, but what's missing?

Nobody's getting hurt here. It's just good business practice. Let's plan our ventures. Aren't there other passages in the Bible that tell us to count the cost of a business plan?

[In Luke 14:28](#) Jesus says, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it. . ."

What's the problem here?

Well, while Jesus was talking about calculating the cost of following Him, James is criticizing people for making plans without any consideration of God.

They have taken their gaze entirely off the eternal, heavenly truth and are focused on the temporal, worldly aspect of reality.

So, in all four of these examples you have a similar vein, like fools' gold, going through the whole passage

1. Envy and self-seeking
2. Desires, lusts, covetousness
3. Slandering and judging for personal gain
4. Seeking success for selfish reasons

Which takes us nicely along to chapter 5, where we get to see the result of all this worldly focused behavior.

VERSE 1: Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in

the last days. 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

You've been sold a bill of goods! The worldly promise, whether it's wealth, fame, adrenaline, power, accomplishment, or anything else is the biggest Ponzi scheme in existence! I mean that literally, because the original Ponzi scheme, named after Charles Ponzi, in the 1920s, promised unbelievable returns on investments, too good to be true. And he wasn't investing anything.

He was just taking later investors money and paying the previous investors with it, giving the appearance of profitability. It looked great. More investors jumped on board, which means that he now had the funds to pay early investors. But then he would need to attract more investors. 100 this month means that he would need 200 more next month. Eventually it got unsustainable and collapsed, but, and remember this was in the 1920's, at its height it's estimated that he was floating around 15 million dollars! That's 220 million today.

James is explicitly saying that your selfish ambition, worldly focused pursuits are an investment in nothing! Not only that, but there are, necessarily victims. If you've put yourself first, you are putting others lower and that, James says, leads to all the evil in the world. So, there are casualties to our foolish behavior, and those victims will cry out against us.

Hard stuff from James.

But, while there is a vein of fools' gold, there is also a vein of pure gold that runs through-out this passage. Because while James wants us to see the devastating effect of our worldly focus, he also wants to point us to the better way!

And the answer is the very next verse. Look at 5:7. "Therefore"!

"Therefore be patient,"

Patient . . . there are two types of patience commonly used in the Bible. One that connotes an idea of bearing up and holding steadfast under pressure, (like Atlas holding up the world). But that's not this one.

This word for patience connotes more of the idea of persevering with people, refusing to retaliate. James use of this fits nicely with the overall context. We are to be patient as we journey on this earth with our brothers and sisters. Patient with them. But why? Back to the text

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth."

Wait, we've seen "fruit" before. Let's go back to the top of our text and re-read that passage in light of this new context.

Look at 3:17, But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Here we have a passage where James is hammering home the horrible things that come about when people behave without the eternal, heavenly perspective. They are looking inward, they are acting in their own self interest, and yet at the beginning and end of this passage he gives us a hope that we can produce good fruit.

How? Only by fixing your gaze on the Lord. At the beginning he calls it the wisdom from above, and here at the end he's telling them to be patient for the coming of the Lord, meaning that is the point in time to which they are looking. Where you place your hopes, where you set your schedule, Where you look determines where you will go.

James gives us hope. There are 3 ways

### SEEK WISDOM FROM ABOVE

Chapter 3, VERSE 13 "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

Where does the meekness come from with wisdom? Meekness means I have to capacity for violence. I have strength, but I hold it in check. How does wisdom give us this meekness?

Wisdom is the eternal perspective with God in charge. Wisdom is seeing that this world is ending, my time here is short, and God will reign forever, so what happens to me here pales in comparison with what awaits me there.

I'm less likely to worry about fighting for "what's mine" and getting ahead on this earth if I'm focused on the eternal perspective.

I can live with the tranquility of knowing that my God is good, and great, and a comforter of those who need comfort.

Isaiah 40:11 gives this beautiful image, "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."

Paul even takes into account that things are not going to always go pleasantly for us in

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us

That is the wisdom from above. That is why I can be meek. I can be peaceable, and yield, I can be gentle, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, because I'm not fighting for me and I'm not fighting for now. I'm serving my God, and he is so good to me. And he wants me to be good to others.

### HUMBLE YOURSELF

The next way we lift our gaze from selfishness is through humility.

It's very similar to meekness, but we have a slightly different view. Rather than looking to eternity, we're looking to the perfect model of humility, Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2:6-8 says this of Jesus "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the

likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

If we're to look heavenward, what better example do we have than Jesus? And it is His own example of humility that we are supposed to emulate . . . with a promise.

James says that while we were not busy scrapping for personal gain, and instead submit ourselves to God and our fellow man, just like Jesus did, that God will exalt us. And what a difference it is to fight for the top spot and attain it, with all the hurt feelings and bruises that accompany the struggle, compared to being a servant who is asked to take the crown!

Which is exactly what happened to Jesus. The next verse in Philippians says

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.

Pay attention to that, because nobody humbled themselves more than Jesus, and nobody was as highly exalted.

This may not be a promise that is borne out for us on this earth, but would you really want it to be? Would you not rather receive your reward in eternity than for a limited time? Do you see how this focus, James wants us to have is so liberating?

#### PUT GOD IN CHARGE

Finally James shows us that who we're working for matters. If we are measuring success by our standards we are acting foolishly, but if we are looking to God for what we should do, when we should do it and where, there is a completely different measurement to our standard of success.

Think about it like this. From Jesus Himself

Matthew 6:31-33 Therefore do not worry, saying, “what shall we eat?” or “what shall we drink?” or “what shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

It's not that you can't plan business ventures or do exciting things. And it's not like you won't still feel the sting of financial loss and the thrill off success! You'll have all those things, but now it will actually matter!

You're building something eternal, not something worldly.

And these three things; Wisdom from above, humility before God, and putting God in charge are the catalysts to pushing us more and more off the horizontal worldly axis of existence, and more and more towards the vertical, heavenly axis. There are no other creatures, to my knowledge, who have this opportunity, to live victorious, redeemed lives, in the midst of the chaos and darkness.

And look at the effect. You have a long history of seeing people flee chaos, instability, war, and cruelty, to find a place where people treat each other fairly and have peace. It's a constant testimony to the good things possible when people's actions are more aligned with the heavenly truth.

But how do we do this? Like the game Othello's motto “a moment to learn, a lifetime to master”



These three actions James calls us to are not profound ideas. They are basic to the Christian life. I doubt anyone in this room is hearing that wisdom, humility, and submitting to God, are good for Christian growth for the first time. They are pretty basic concepts.

But just like the game of Othello, if you think that by learning the rules, you've mastered the game, you're badly mistaken. You need to play with the rules, see them work out in different iterations, interactions, see how others approach it. It is through constant practice of the fundamentals that deeper levels of understanding emerge.

Martial arts masters commonly say that they find more pleasure from the earliest, basic moves after they have mastered the most complex. Because they understand more, the basics have more meaning.

Probably all of us can remember a moment of spiritual discovery where the concept of love, patience, joy, or faith, took on a deeper meaning. Like a 2-d picture going 3-d, suddenly there's more. It's the same concept, but suddenly I can see more complexity and detail. I understand it like never before and I want to tell everyone, "It's all about love!"

And they, like me a year ago, say, "yeah, we know,"

And you want to shake them and say, no, it's like, so much more! You're looking at the ink, I had a glimpse of the seal!

It's through the practice of these basic truths that we ascend to a higher and higher understanding of eternal truths, Be Doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves

It's always a struggle, and we'll never fully arrive, until we see "face to face."

But each day on this earth we have the potential to bring more of the heavenly axis into this world

And we can be, more and more, the light and peace and fruit of heavenly creatures, trapped in a mortal shell, in a sin-cursed world, causing the corrupted earth to produce a harvest of precious fruit.

## James 3:13-5:7 Small Group Questions

1. Wisdom from above brings many good things, compare the list in 3:16 to Galatians 5:22-23. What similarities do you see?
2. In James 4:8 we see the phrase “double-minded.” Look back at James 1:5-8 and compare the two passages. What can you learn with the combined context?
3. James 4:7 promises that if we resist the devil he will flee from us and if we draw near to God He will draw near to us; when have you experienced either of those promises in your own life?
4. In 4:11-12, James tells us what not to do, but in what way should we be interacting with brothers and sisters in keeping with the context of the overall passage?
5. When have you entered into a major life change only to realize that you never considered what God wanted or sought Him?
6. When have you entered into a major life change in which you sought God’s will and believed He was in it?
7. If you’ve done both, what, if any, lessons did you learn?
8. Where are the areas in your life where your looking at yourself, or the time-line of your life and, how can you instead shift your focus to be looking at what God wants and begin looking more toward the coming of the Lord?