



MAKING IT REAL 7 - Patience and Prayer James 5 v 1 to 20

At the end of chapter 4, James has focussed on the merchant class. In chapter 5 he switches his attention to the landowning class but the emphasis is similar – the desire for wealth. But you will also find James' constant theme of the outworking of faith in everyday life is still the underlying value. The rich are heading for 'misery' (5:1) not because they are rich but because their wealth is what drives them. He does not hold back – a life of irresponsible luxury is nothing short of murder. That is not language we would use today. The faith/works connection is made when James points out that rich people do not pay the right wages (5:4). It appears that wealth can easily make you greedier.

As a starter you might like to discuss how James' ideas apply to us. Are we too easily sucked into the desire to be richer?

How do we counter an acquisitive nature?

James has done his best to instruct 1st century believers in how to live in a way that aligns with their faith. As with so many epistles, he finishes with some words of hope and encouragement. He points his readers to the coming of Christ in glory – an important part of the persecuted church's way of living in those days. You are encouraged to stand firm because this present life is finite and, one day, there will be a life of pain free glory. He is clearly helping them to deal with present suffering knowing that it will not be for ever.

Have we lost this wonderful future hope of Christ's return?

Do we say 'it hasn't happened yet so will it ever'?

Do we even doubt that Christ will return in glory one day?

James cannot resist, even in this final section, reminding them of how to behave. The emphasis on 'not swearing' (5:12) is there because James is countering the trend to make oaths about many things. All you need to say is 'yes' or 'no' as appropriate – you don't need to add the weight of a god to strengthen your response. At this time, it was common to 'swear by Jupiter' (or some other deity) to convince people you meant what you said.

Prayer is a key element to this section. 'Is any one in trouble? He should pray' is a similar statement to Jesus' words when he says we should 'always pray and not lose heart' (Luke 18:1). This implies the opposite is true – if you don't pray you **will** lose heart. Prayer is always at the heart of healing ministry. But it's not all gloom – if we're happy we're encouraged to sing songs of praise. How we've missed that in lockdown.

The last two verses are precious. The readers of this letter may have felt condemned by some of James' strong statements. But he finishes with a reminder that sinners like us can be restored and anyone who is part of that restoration process has saved a person from spiritual death.

FROM THE PASSAGE

James raises the question of wealth in verses 1 to 6. Luxury and self-indulgence are strongly condemned. James uses the word 'murder' to describe the effect on those who should be paid a proper wage. There is a gross picture of corrosion and decay to describe acquired wealth.

1. How do we guard against accumulating wealth in our society?

We have been concerned about our health in recent months but have we been even more concerned about the economy and how our wealth may be threatened?

Is it time to look at our nation and our resources and see how that wealth can be used to help those in greater need? (e.g. vaccination for poorer countries – Africa is only 2% vaccinated)

How do we draw a line between being 'comfortable' and 'over indulgence'?

James wants us to 'be patient ... until the Lord's coming' (v7). The Greek word 'Parousia' refers to his expected coming. The event is a certainty – the timing is not known. This can cause doubts to creep into our belief that Jesus will return in glory because, we might say, we've waited over 2000 years and he still hasn't come. We are encouraged to be patient just like the farmer who has to wait for crops to grow.

2. How are you doing on patience? Have recent months caused you to reflect that it would be great if Jesus came back today?
As part of being patient we are told not to 'grumble against each other'. Move on if you've never grumbled. If you have, maybe share with each other how your 'grumbling mode' often kicks in.

James also mentions suffering – an acknowledgement that it was happening at this time. Job is mentioned as the major Bible character to endure suffering.

3. The big question here is in verse 11. We are told that those who persevere through hard times are blessed. Also, the Lord is there with us 'full of compassion and mercy'.
Is that how you see suffering or do you see it as unfair and cruel?

James turns us to think about how we will cope with life in the future. How we speak, how we pray and how we sing. Perhaps we should sing songs of praise when we are happy and wherever we are (maybe not on a bus).

4. Is a prayer for healing too little used. Verse 15 appears to say that the 'prayer offered in faith **will** make the sick person well'.
But we all know of cases where prayer is offered and the person doesn't get better. Does this mean those who pray are not 'righteous'?
Is healing in this context only about physical healing?
Should we be more positive in praying for those who are sick – should we be more specific?

James' last words are about restoration. It is said to be a great thing to help someone come back to the Lord.

5. Should each of us have a 'project' to help one person be restored to faith in Christ.
Do we too easily let go of people who drift away from our fellowship

THINGS TO DO

In these days, patience and prayer are not easy. We are surrounded by so much uncertainty and things we treated as normal have vanished. Here are some things to counter it James' style.

1. Pray for people 'in the particular' – in other words by name. Don't just pray for 'all the missionaries in Africa'. Find out about the person you pray for so you can be more specific in your prayers.
2. Think of someone who is unwell. Pray that in God's mercy they may be restored in body, mind and spirit.
3. You may want to ask God to help you be more controlled in the way you speak. 'Yes' and 'no' is enough.
4. Ask God to help you stop grumbling (if you ever do)
5. Think of someone you know who has drifted away from Christian fellowship (maybe in lockdown) Ask God for wisdom as to how you could help them be restored.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Now we've got to the end of James, take time to read through the whole book one more time.

Are there two lessons which God has challenged you about – how about acting on them both.