



## James Chapter Five

### VII James 4:13-5:12 - The Sins of the Wealthy (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Five

As James draws his letter to a close he denounces the judgments of God upon those wealthy landowners who oppress and enslave the poor, showing them how great their sin and folly are in the sight of God, and how grievous the punishments will be unless they mend their ways and repent (vv.1-6).

All of the faithful are called to patient forbearance under their trials and sufferings (vv.7-11). The sin of making false oaths is cautioned against in v.12.

Disciples of Christ are directed as to how they should act, both under affliction and in prosperity (v.13), whilst prayer for the sick, and their anointing with oil by the elders of the church, are prescribed in vv.14-15.

Christians are directed to acknowledge their faults to one another, to pray for each other, and the efficacy of prayer is proven (vv.16-18).

Finally, it is recommended that believers should do all that they can in bringing those that stray from the ways of truth back into the Kingdom of God.

#### VII.b James 5:1-6 - James Warning to Rich Oppressors

God's Word is clear: <<*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants*>> (Leviticus 25:23). James now asserts that his statements on wealth creation, without regards to God's will, are extended to encompass material wealth as well. God rules over wealth and requires obedience to his will in all use of it. This fact put the Israelites in the position of tenants rather than landowners, as noted in Scripture; they were obligated not to take advantage of each other and not to enslave each other; they were to follow instead the admonition to fear God. James' paragraph flows from the same worldview and could be summarised with the same admonition.

James turns his attention from businesspeople (James 4:13-17), to the wealthy landowners who controlled much of Galilee (v.4), and indeed much of the Roman Empire. James is speaking rhetorically to unbelievers who would not be receiving the letter. He denounces them for their materialistic accumulation of wealth, for defrauding their workers, and for their self-indulgent actions that have led to the deaths of innocent, righteous people.

The poor among the Jews received the Gospel, and many of them believed; but the generality of the rich rejected Christianity, and were hardened in their unbelief; they hated and persecuted those who believed in Christ: **<<For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him>>** (Psalm 109:31).

To these oppressing, unbelieving, persecuting, rich people, James mainly addresses himself in the first six verses, not with instruction or exhortation but with thorough condemnation, refusing to give the slightest hint that any redemption is expected: **<<Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent. Therefore, as tongues of fire lick up straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers blow away like dust; for they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty and spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel>>** (Isaiah 5:22-24).

<sup>1</sup> Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.

### James 5:1

**Now listen, you rich people.** James is addressing unbelievers who are unlikely to ever hear his message. Even if they did they would probably reject it due to their self-assurance: **<<The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the Lord>>** (Obadiah 3-4). James’ purpose in condemning the wealthy oppressors in this way is in the hope that he will discourage his readership from holding grudges or from becoming discouraged by their persecution, leaving these wealthy people to face God’s wrath when it comes. Its purpose is also a warning: judgment does come upon such sin, so they should be careful to avoid becoming materialistic themselves.

**Weep and wail.** This is prophetic language for those under indictment by God when the Day of the Lord arrives: **<<Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty>>** (Isaiah 13:6), **<<In the streets they wear sackcloth; on the roofs and in the public squares they all wail, prostrate with weeping>>** (Isaiah 15:3), **<<They do not cry out to me from their hearts but wail upon their beds. They gather together for grain and new wine but turn away from me>>** (Hosea 7:14), **<<“In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies – flung everywhere! Silence!”>>** (Amos 8:3), and: **<<But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion**

*turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish*>> (Jonah 3:8-9).

Such people may be used to saying: <<*And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry"*>> (Luke 12:19), but James says weep and wail for they have a future reserved in a place: <<*where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*>> (Matthew 13:42b).

Misery that is coming upon you. This is referring to final judgment, rather than the miseries of this life. Jesus has pronounced woes on just such people: <<*But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort*>> (Luke 6:24). Although James was writing in the main to Jewish Christians, his language seems to clearly include those who have not truly come to faith, or providing guidance for believers as to how they should address those in the world who are drawing them away from the faith. Given some of the issues dealt in Chapters 3 and 4, it is also clear that James does not consider all those in church to be true believers.

<sup>2</sup> Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. <sup>3</sup> 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 5:2-3

Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. James again returns to Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount: <<*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust 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).

Wealth, clothes, and gold sum up the sumptuous, materialistic lifestyle of these landowners. These things will not only be lost forever, but will be evidence at their final trial before God and will feed the very flames of the lake of fire, where they will spend eternity: <<*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*>> (Revelation 20:11-15).

Testify against you. The evil actions of the wealthy who actively oppress the poor are being acknowledged by God, who will use this as evidence when the books are opened on the Day of Judgement, for these people have hoarded wealth in the last days, instead of repenting of their sin and accepting the Gospel that would have brought them peace in this life, and salvation into the next. James, however, is not particularly amused with the irony of it all. He is moved far more by the

offensiveness of the sin that the rich have dared to hoard wealth even in the days when they should be most concerned to repent. In the context of the last days, when the rich should be most in fear of God, their greed amounts to a mocking of God, a hurling of arrogant insults into God's face.

The corrosive effect their wealth is having on their soul will destroy them in terms of their humanity, i.e. it will eat your flesh like fire.

Jesus has given clear instruction how people should go about things in this life: <<*Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys*>> (Luke 12:33), but he also notes, without any satisfaction: <<*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*>> (Mark 10:25).

### James 5:4-5

The charges James brings against these evil wealthy people, for he is not speaking against wealth itself, may be summarised as greed and injustice. The greed of the rich has consisted of hoarding wealth, while living in luxury and self-indulgence. The injustice has consisted of cheating workers out of their wages, then condemning and murdering innocent people. But these charges are not listed calmly, as if being played out in a court of law; they seem to tumble off James' pen in his moral outrage against their immorality.

<sup>4</sup> Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

### James 5:4

The cries of the harvesters. These landowners have cheated their field workers and harvesters to support their own lavish lifestyle, and now the cries of those defrauded have reached the ears of the final Judge, who will soon act in response. These landowners pay no heed to the fact that they need the labourers as much as the labourers need their pay. They no doubt contracted the labourers to work for them at a low rate and, although the poor labourers had kept their part of the contract, the wealthy owners reneged on theirs.

The Lord Almighty, Kyriou Sabaoth, means the Lord of hosts, or the Lord of heaven's armies, and which pictures God as a warrior going into battle against his enemies. It is often used in situations where the people are defenceless and in need of protection, that God often provided through men: <<*David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied"*>> (1 Samuel 17:45), but at times he does so in person: <<*They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers*>> (Revelation 17:14), and: <<*The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean*>> (Revelation 19:14).

<sup>5</sup> You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

### James 5:5

Lived on earth in luxury. The result of this was seen in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: <<“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ““No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’”>> (Luke 16:19-31). This account paints a picture of what it will be like for the wealthy who do not use their wealth wisely before God, for nowhere does it say this was a bad man. In fact, he clearly cared about the welfare of his brothers. It also prophesied the denial of the Gospel when it states: <<they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead>> (Luke 16:31b).

Fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. Like the cattle in their fields, the rich gorge themselves on luxuries, as they do on days of great slaughter for their annual festivals, or when King Solomon first dedicated the temple in Jerusalem: <<Then the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifices before the Lord. Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the Lord: twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the Lord>> (1 Kings 8:62-63), or the daily consumption in King Solomon’s court: <<Solomon’s daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl>> (1 Kings 4:22-23). Perhaps they were inspired by the feasts of foreign kings: <<At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendour and glory of his majesty>> (Esther 1:2-4). But what they failed to realise was that they are headed for the final slaughter: <<In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and

*every lofty hill>> (Isaiah 30:25), <<Yet you know me, O Lord; you see me and test my thoughts about you. Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter!>> (Jeremiah 12:3), <<And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh>> (Revelation 19:17-21).*

Fattened yourselves. They seem to forget that it was God who fed them initially and who continues to provide all good things that are supposed to be accepted with thanksgiving and joy, and to be consumed in moderation. They have gone the way of their predecessors: *<<When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me>> (Hosea 13:6).*

<sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

### James 5:6

You have condemned and murdered. The language here does not speak of justice but of criminality. Ultimately, the innocent believers will be justified and the perpetrators of this evil will be the ones who stand condemned: *<<Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him>> (Psalm 34:21-22).* Jesus had said: *<<If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent>> (Matthew 12:7),* and: *<<Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned>> (John 5:28-29).* Paul observes: *<<For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness>> (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).*

Innocent men or righteous person, (Greek dikaios), may have a double meaning: both one of God’s forgiven people and a person who is innocent of the death sentence that the wealthy have handed him.

Who were not opposing you. The innocent men do not resist for a righteous person does not avenge himself. Once again James is alluding to the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: *<<You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as*

*well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you>> (Matthew 5:38-42). These believers were living in a manner of patient endurance, as their faith in Christ called them to do. They will receive their reward for doing so.*

*It was not uncommon for the wealthy to rob and kill people in order to acquire more land. One well documented case was when King Ahab wanted to purchase the vineyard of Naboth, who would not sell it as it was his ancestral land. Ahab's wife Jezebel stepped in with a plot: <<So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death">> (1 Kings 21:8-10), which is precisely what happened.*

*When such people do suffer, and yield without resistance to, or even die because of, the unjust sentence of oppressors, this is marked by God, to the honour of the sufferers and the infamy of their persecutors; this commonly shows that judgments are at the door, and believers may certainly conclude that a day of reckoning is coming, to reward the patience of the oppressed and to deal appropriately with the oppressor.*

*The church, however, does not have to be passive in this. It has a voice that can be raised both in intercessory prayer: <<I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth>> (Isaiah 62:6-7), and as a persistent call to those in power to implement social justice for all. One of the ministries of the church today must be the prophetic sharing of truth. The world needs the church to address personal and societal abuses of wealth with James' twin messages of encouragement toward righteousness and warning against wickedness.*

#### **VII.c James 5:7-12 - Patience in Suffering**

The attention turns from rich to poor, from unbeliever to believer, from the evil oppressors to the righteous oppressed, from presumption to patience. Rather than fighting back, they are called to patient endurance and to trust in God to vindicate them. There are some who do not like this style of bringing a message, splitting it between the unbelievers and sinners as seen in vv.1-6, and then turning to those saved, still of course sinners but trying to live according to the word of truth. By doing it this way James is clearly dividing his message between the condemnations of the oppressors and giving a word of encouragement for the persevering saints.

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

## James 5:7

**Be patient.** This Christian patience is not a mere yielding to necessity, as the moral patience taught by some philosophers was, but it is a humble acquiescence in the wisdom and will of God, with an eye to a future glorious reward. King David was a man that knew he had to be patient in times of trial and that he could always rely on God to answer his call: <<*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes*>> (Psalm 37:7), the call is to: <<*Be still, and know that I am God*>> (Psalm 46:10a).

**Until the Lord's coming.** No matter what a disciple of Christ has to endure during this life, they know they live in hope for the great day when they will finally receive the reward for their endurance and perseverance: <<*Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth*>> (Revelation 3:10).

**The farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop.** Although this was probably meant as a typical agricultural analogy to reinforce the message of patience, it does remind believers of just how patient God has been over the generations to harvest his own crop, which he will do with finality on the Last Day that James has also been discussing: <<*Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together*>> (John 4:36), and: <<*Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested*>> (Revelation 14:15-16).

<sup>8</sup> You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

## James 5:8

**Stand firm.** James repeats the call for God is faithful as he has shown in the past, just as God had spoken through the prophet of this promise to King Jehoshaphat: <<*You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you*>> (2 Chronicles 20:17).

The psalmist writes: <<*But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*>> (Psalm 73:2-3), which may be the way that some of these people were feeling, unsteady on their feet due to the constant oppression, but James call is for them to **be patient and stand firm**, for the end is assured.

**The Lord's coming is near.** It was commonly taught by the 1<sup>st</sup> Century leaders that Christ would return in their life time, despite his teaching to the contrary. It is an attitude that all disciples should have for they know that, with each passing generation, the Day is ever closer!

<sup>9</sup> Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

### James 5:9

Don't grumble against each other. The Israelites had grumbled against God in the desert: <<Moses also said, "You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'" While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God'">> (Exodus 16:8-12). There were also many of Jesus' disciples who complained when they found that following him was not such an easy option as they may have at first thought: <<On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him>> (John 6:60-66). There remain many grumblers in church today!

You will be judged. James offers this as a clear statement of fact. All of mankind will face judgement on the appropriate day: <<For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead>> (Acts 17:31).

The Judge is standing at the door. James indicates just how close that everybody is standing to their time of judgement. But with Jesus at the door it is never too late in this life to accept his gracious offer of true life: <<Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened>> (Matthew 7:7-8), and: <<Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me>> (Revelation 3:20).

<sup>10</sup> Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

### James 5:10

The face of suffering. It was not just the OT prophets but also the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews that could be held up as an example: <<Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were

*publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated*>> (Hebrews 10:32-33).

The prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. These prophets, people who were particularly favoured by God and called personally to serve him were treated quite appallingly for their faithfulness to God because what they said was not very palatable at times. Most of them suffered persecution and many died. Stephen spoke of this as he faced the Sanhedrin: <<*“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it”*>> (Acts 7:51-53), and the writer to the Hebrews also records their injustice: <<*Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground*>> (Hebrews 11:36-38).

<sup>11</sup> As you know, we consider 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 5:11

As you know. The apostles were careful to remind their readers of what they already knew as it is a human trait to forget things, even that which is often of fundamental importance: <<*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you*>> (Philippians 3:1), <<*Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position*>> (2 Peter 3:17), <<*And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love*>> (2 John 5-6), and: <<*Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe*>> (Jude 5).

We consider blessed those who have persevered. James had written of this earlier: <<*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12).

Job’s perseverance. This can be seen from the very outset when Job received news that he had lost his family and his wealth: <<*At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”* In

*all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing>> (Job 1:20-22).*

And have seen what the Lord finally brought about. Job had lost everything when God allowed him to be tested by the Devil, but God restored all things in the end: *<<After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before>> (Job 42:10).* This came to Job in this life but for many the restoration will come about in the life to come, as he has promised: *<<I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten>> (Joel 2:25a).*

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. God had spoken to Moses about his own attributes: *<<And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion>> (Exodus 33:19),* and King David’s request that God bestows it upon him: *<<Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions>> (Psalm 51:1).*

<sup>12</sup> Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.

### James 5:12

This is one of James’ strongest links to the Sermon on the Mount in the whole letter, as it is almost a quote from Jesus: *<<Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one>> (Matthew 5:33-37).* Towards the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus would condemn the religious leaders for allowing different levels of oaths, so that they could be broken without losing face or sinning: *<<Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it>> (Matthew 23:16-22).*

Do not swear. James is not referring to foul and abusive language, as some claim, but about the making of oaths before God, for men have a habit of not keeping what they commit themselves to do. When believers break their word they bring disrepute to the name of God and they will be condemned for doing so. David writes: *<<They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your*

**name>>** (Psalm 139:20). If God objects to his enemies abusing his name, how must he feel when those who say they believe in him bring dishonour to it? He has also clearly stated in the third commandment: <<***You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name***>> (Exodus 20:7).

Here, James wants them to be steadfast in what they promise to stick to what they have agreed to - **Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no.** A person is judged by whether they keep their word or not, for their word is their bond. The consequences for not doing so are dire!

## **VIII James 5:13-20 - The Prayer of Faith**

Speaking mainly of prayer, James restates some of the letter’s key themes, including trials (James 1:2-4), and misuse of the tongue. The ultimate way to tame the tongue (James 3:8) is to: <<***pray for each other***>> (v.16). It will also help those who are having difficulty in formulating their speech and promises, as noted in v.12.

<sup>13</sup> Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

### **James 5:13-14**

There is another ABA pattern in these verses as we saw in Chapter 3. James begins with those suffering (A), then addresses the cheerful (B), and concludes with those who are sick (A). He alludes back to James 1:2, where the one under trial was to: <<***consider it pure joy***>>.

As always a believer is called to **pray**. For James here it is to ask for help in a time of **trouble**, but a believer should seek God on all issues of consequence.

**Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.** A believer will sing songs of praise to God to reflect their happiness and thanksgiving, such as God delivering his people through the Red Sea: <<***Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea***>> (Exodus 15:1). However, it is also appropriate to sing just as joyously in times of great difficulty and danger, as seen in a Philippi prison: <<***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them***>> (Acts 17:25).

Although **sick**, Greek *astheneō*, can also mean to be weak - even spiritually weak: <<***Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters***>> (Romans 14:1), when used, as it is here, without any qualifiers, it usually refers to physical sickness. Such illness can be as part of a believer’s trials as seen with King Hezekiah, who afterward praised God saying: <<***Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back***>> (Isaiah 38:17), or perhaps a disability that may have been linked to sin, that seems to be the case with one man cured by Jesus: <<***Later Jesus found him at the temple and said***>>

to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you”>> (John 5:14).

Elders were pastors and overseers, known for wisdom and maturity, who functioned as leaders in the churches: <<*An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it*>> (Titus 1:6-9).

This provides evidence for a plurality of elders in all the churches to which James was writing, for he simply assumes a sick person could call the elders of the church. As James is writing in the early to mid 40’s, it shows this was a pattern of leadership that was established very early on in the history of the church.

Some think that anoint him with oil was medicinal or sacramental, as in Roman Catholic extreme unction at death, but it is best seen as a symbol representing the healing power of the Holy Spirit to come upon the sick person. The original twelve apostles used oil on their first ministry without Jesus being with them: <<*They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them*>> (Mark 6:13).

There are several examples of anointing for symbolic consecration to God’s use and service, both in the OT: <<*After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests*>> (Exodus 28:41), and in the NT: <<*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed*>> (Luke 4:18), <<*You know what has happened throughout Judæa, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him*>> (Acts 10:37-38), <<*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*>> (2 Corinthians 1:21-22), and: <<*You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy*>> (Hebrews 1:9).

In the name of the Lord means it is God, and not the oil that heals!

<sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

### James 5:15

The prayer offered in faith. Not necessarily the faith of the sick person but the faith of those praying. In this instance, James mentions no requirement for the

sick person to exercise faith, only that he call for the elders. There is a great example of this in the Gospels, where Jesus notes it was the faith of the sick man's friends that alerted him and not that of sick man himself: <<***A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralysed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven"***>> (Mark 2:1-5). Christians who are ill often find personal prayer difficult and rely on their brothers and sisters to intercede on their behalf. Of course, there are examples when it is the individual's faith that marks them out for healing. For example: <<***In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk***>> (Acts 14:8-10).

Will make the sick person well is often translated as save and perhaps carries a double meaning here:

1. The sick person will be physically healed, which is one meaning of Greek *sōzō*, and/or
2. The sick person may also experience spiritual salvation or growth in the blessings of salvation, i.e. their sins are forgiven as noted with the sick man lowered to Jesus. Such spiritual healing is another meaning of Greek *sōzō*.

As seen throughout the Gospels, Jesus heals both physically and spiritually, and the same double connotation may be present here as well. Further examples are the woman who was healed from 12 years of prolonged menstrual bleeding, simply by touching Jesus' cloak: <<***Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering"***>> (Mark 5:33-34). Or the woman who had lived a sinful life, came to anoint Jesus' feet with perfume but instead wet them with her tears and then wiped them dry with her hair. The Pharisees with Jesus disputed that he should not even let such a woman near him but, after soundly rebuking the men: <<***Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace"***>> (Luke 7:50), where on both occasions the women were spiritually healed and brought into his kingdom.

James is not teaching that all illnesses will be healed if people would simply call on the elders, or try to make themselves have enough faith, or pray with enough conviction. Healing, when it does come, is always a gift from God, who is sovereign over all circumstances, including sickness and health. It does not follow, therefore, that lack of faith on the part of the sick person, or of those praying, is the reason that the sick person may not be healed.

The Lord will raise him up. This was the will of the Father: <<***And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but***>>

**raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day>> (John 6:39-40).**

Some interpreters suggest that James is referring to the promise of the resurrection rather than physical healing. The phrase if he has sinned implies that not all sickness is connected to specific sins, although James seems to expect that some sickness is, as does Paul: *<<A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep>> (1 Corinthians 11:28-30).* Illness is rarely caused by demonic possession as some have claimed. The Gospels separate the two: *<<That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was>> (Mark 1:32-34).*

Will be forgiven. All people who accept Jesus as their Lord and come before God with a genuine repentant heart, asking forgiveness for all their sins, will receive God's gracious gift. Jesus has promised this: *<<I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them>> (Mark 3:28),* but with the proviso: *<<Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven>> (Luke 6:37),* and Peter gives instruction to those who witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: *<<Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit">> (Acts 2:38).*

<sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

### James 5:16

Confess your sins to each other. There are several interpretations to this verse. Some commentators link it to v.14 and believe that if a particular sin is the cause of their sickness then it needs to be confessed to the elders in order for them to pray appropriately for the healing. Others believe James is referring to sins committed against an individual and the sin must then be confessed to that individual with a request for their forgiveness. Sometimes confession in the community is needed before healing can take place, since a sin against the church may be the cause of the sickness. If the person has a close friend or belongs to a trusted group then it can be helpful to confess to them so they can pray with the person for forgiveness and also act as accountability partners for the person to help him not to digress into sin again. Individuals should be careful not to confess sins that others may find difficult to deal with, as this can cause more harm than good and may even cause relationships to fail.

Pray for each other is directed to all the readers of James' letter and indicates that he did not expect prayer for healing to be limited to the elders (v.14). Also, it

is important to pray into all sorts of areas of other people's lives, to strengthen them, guide them and continue to bless them in all they do.

The righteous will have great power in prayer, as God grants their requests. They do not have any power in or of themselves, just as they are not righteous by their own abilities, actions and deeds. All believers need to be sure their heart is right before coming before the Lord, as the psalmist confirms: <<*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened*>> (Psalm 66:18).

For prayer to be powerful and effective it needs to be authentic and heartfelt. It should not be plastic or manufactured, nor couched in super-spiritual language, not lengthy for show or to impress others as some of the religious leaders would do: <<*They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely*>> (Mark 12:40). A believer should simply pour out their heart to God in praise and thanksgiving, in all humility, love and with the faith to believe that God will answer that prayer.

<sup>17</sup> Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup> Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

### James 5:17-18

Elijah was a man just like us. If James believes this then he is also saying that believers are men like Elijah - praise indeed. Of course, Elijah had his faults and was admonished by God for them: <<*There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too"*>> (1 Kings 19:9-10).

Elijah illustrates how a man with a nature like ours could have the powerful prayer life of a righteous person. The drought recorded in 1 Kings Chapters 17-18 was punishment on King Ahab and Israel for idolatry, and the three and a half years is probably derived from: <<*in the third year*>> (1 Kings 18:1b), as symbolic of judgment, as it is half of the seven years of the great tribulation: <<*He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time*>> (Daniel 7:25), and God's two witnesses: <<*These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want*>> (Revelation 11:6), to list but a few of the end time prophecies of this time period.

### James 5:19-20 - Concluding Admonition

The style of James is abrupt, and there is no concluding greeting as in most NT letters. Instead, James calls the community to action in helping those who have fallen into the ethical sins dealt with in the book. Therefore, this closing section acts as a summary of various sins and their solutions.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,

### James 5:19

**My brothers.** James continues to address his readership with a tone of equality in Christ, this being the 17<sup>th</sup> occurrence in his letter. The first was at the very beginning: *<<Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds>>* (James 1:2).

The righteous saints must be vigilant in spotting anyone who should wander from the truth, namely, by not living in accordance with the word of truth, called for earlier in the letter: *<<He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created>>* (James 1:18). Right belief is exhibited in right living: *<<My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does. If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world>>* (James 1:19-27).

Someone should bring him back. It is the responsibility for all believers to help to guide someone back to faith whom they know to have wandered away. This should be done first through prayer and then through encouragement. Jesus speaks of such an occasion: *<<Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent">>* (Luke 15:3-7).

<sup>20</sup> remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

### James 5:20

**Remember this.** This is an unusual way to end a NT epistle, with no personal greeting or benediction. But James call here highlights the importance of his final instruction to them. Helping to save someone from the spiritual death that awaits unbelievers is, without doubt, the most important task a disciple can undertake.

Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way. This is a primary task for all believers, whether they are called explicitly to work as an evangelist, or just an ordinary disciple going about their daily life that attracts another person to the faith by displaying openly the love of Christ within them. Of course, no person can bring anyone to faith, that is the work of the Holy Spirit, but followers of Jesus can help to bring other people to a place where they will be receptive to the work of the Spirit and recognise it for what it is.

Save him from death. Not physical death but spiritual death: *<<If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death>>* (1 John 5:16-17). Timely intervention: *<<Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently>>* (Galatians 6:1a), and: *<<But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness>>* (Hebrews 3:13), will save his soul and bring forgiveness from God. The person who saves the sinner in this case is the person who restores the one who has fallen.

There are those who would condemn someone they had found to be a sinner, but Jesus teaches what a believer should do: *<<But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin">>* (John 8:1-11). The earliest manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11. The account recorded may not have been written personally by John, but it was accepted by the early church that he taught on it at least and therefore its inclusion can be considered authentic and to have apostolic authority.

Ultimately, of course, only the Lord saves a person. The one who restores the person will cover over a multitude of sins of the one who had strayed, for the one who returns from the way of error receives forgiveness. Again, only God can cover sin, but Christians can be agents of God's forgiveness.

## Epilogue

James continued to faithfully serve his Lord in the Jerusalem church for about 20 years after writing this letter. He was a prominent figure in his day, as can be seen both from other NT Scriptures and historic documents from his day.

He was a thorn in the flesh to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem until AD62 when there was a hiatus in Roman rule due to the death of the governor Porcius Festus. The high priest Ananus took the opportunity of having James and other church leaders arrested on bogus charges of contravening the Law of Moses and had them all stoned to death. Ananus was subsequently removed from the high priesthood on the arrival of the new governor Lucceius Albinus.

James was a faithful servant of God as both a Jew and then as a Christian. He has left a legacy for all believers in Christ to be thankful for. Surely he had prophesied his own reward: <<*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12).