

James 5:1-12

Patience

One might argue that James follows a pattern in his epistle that is perhaps best described by Peter in 1Pet. 4:17 *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*

I know that any time I conduct a study in James' epistle, I point out that James doesn't pull any punches. He has no sympathy for the type of Christianity that doesn't effect men's lives. He recognizes that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation and he applies that truth to professing Christians in such a way as to challenge them to examine their own hearts before God.

If your actions aren't effected by the gospel – if your outlook on life is not effected by the gospel – if your view of sin is not effected by the gospel – if your speech is not effected by the gospel – then James challenges you to consider whether or not your religion is vain. In chp. 4 he deals with the subject of pure religion becoming vain. It's possible for a Christian to begin well but through carelessness and especially worldliness it becomes possible for pure religion to become defiled and James issues a number of exhortations that are designed to reverse that trend when it appears:

Submit yourselves to God; Resist the devil; Draw nigh to God; Cleanse your hands; Purify your hearts; Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord – etc.

In all of these issues, treated as they are by James in a very straightforward manner, we could say in the words of Peter that *judgment had begun at the house of God*. Or to be more precise James is calling upon his readers to judge themselves lest they be judged. In spite of the trying circumstances of his readers James first applies the sword of the Spirit to their own hearts first.

But when you come to chp. 5, you could say that James follows the pattern of the 2nd part of 1Pet. 4:17 – *and if it* (i.e. judgement) *first begin at us what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?* In order to understand this section of the epistle I think we have to keep the setting in mind. James is addressing his epistle *to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*. The early Christians, you may recall had to flee Jerusalem because of persecution. They left their homes, their jobs, their familiar surroundings and had to seek refuge where they could find it.

You might well imagine what it must have been like for those early Christians trying to find shelter for their families – or for husbands and fathers trying to find a way to provide for their wives and children. And the picture that emerges from chp. 5 is the picture of the unconverted Jews who saw these Christians in their plight and were willing to take advantage of them – by providing meager subsistence for them while basking in luxury themselves as they treated Christians fraudulently.

It's rather amazing to remember how sharply James has been dealing with these professing Christians under such dire circumstances. But it's because James knew that the gospel really is the power of God unto salvation and that Christ really does rule and reign over all. Dire circumstances can't change that – and so dire circumstances cannot be used as an excuse to justify vain religion or an excuse for allowing pure religion to become vain. But now at last in chp. 5, having dealt with the believers in Christ, James now in the first 6 verses of this chapter addresses the Christian's persecutors. James, you see, is not unmindful of the circumstances of his readers and neither is God unmindful of the challenges that Christians face. And so James issues a denunciation upon those who live in the world and live for the world and treat others within the world in such cruel fashion.

I don't know whether or not those being addressed by James in this section would ever have occasion to read James' strong denunciation. I find myself in agreement with Albert Barnes' interpretation of this passage. Barnes feels that James' aim is to encourage the believers by this denunciation upon their persecutors. He wants them to be aware of the truth that God was not indifferent to their plight. Their cries *are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth* he writes in v. 4.

And in the light of coming judgment his exhortation to the afflicted Christians is to be patient – ***Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord*** (v. 7). ***Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh*** (v. 8). This is a call for endurance or perseverance. *Behold we count them happy which endure* (v. 11).

This verse holds out hope – not merely that the Christian will endure – but he'll actually be blessed in his endurance. He can still, in spite of dire circumstances, be happy in his walk with the Lord. This is true freedom – being happy in the Lord in spite of the circumstances of life. How is it to be done? How is patience gained? I think v. 8 provides the key – *Be ye also patient*; and then comes the key to gaining patience. Notice what James says next in v. 8: ***stablish your hearts***. Another version translates it: *Strengthen your hearts*. This is how patience is gained. This is how the Christian gains the strength to endure. He must stablish his heart. This is where I want to focus your attention today, therefore. In order to gain the needed patience that enables the Christian to endure even in the midst of challenging circumstances:

We Must Establish Our Hearts Before the Lord

And James gives us a number of things in this section that enables us to do it. Consider first that we may establish our hearts and gain patience and persevere in the faith:

I. By Seeing the Temporal Nature of Worldly Riches – {cf. vv. 2,3,5}

James paints a very vivid picture for us in this section. Imagine if you will a man that had all manner of luxuries in this life. He fared sumptuously every day. He always had

plenty to eat. He never lacked anything that the world had to offer. He had the latest fashions in clothes, a large house, and treasures untold. He was never at a loss for entertainment and everyone waited on him. He was important. He delegated all his responsibilities and then took his ease.

But then time ran its course and now that man appears before God's throne. His riches now are corrupted. His garments now are moth-eaten. He stands before God like an impoverished beggar with a handful of rust in his fists. This is all his treasures amount to on this occasion. And his wanton way of life and fraudulent treatment of those underneath him is all exposed.

Do you see what James says such a person has done in v.3 – *ye have heaped up treasure together for the last days.*

You remember what James said back in chp. 4 when he was dealing with those whose pure religion had become defiled? Look at v. 4 – *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

James likens a worldly Christian to a soldier in the trenches who manages to drift across no man's land and ends up in the enemies trenches now facing God seemingly as an enemy. How much worse do you suppose it will be for the man who has been in the trenches of the world all his days – who has always been an enemy of God and has always pledged his allegiance to the things of this world?

Paul speaks of these people in similar terms that James uses in v. 3 when he writes in Romans 2:5 *But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

The things of this world will have no power when the days of this world have run their course. This world is temporal. This world is corrupted. The accumulated goods of this world cannot redeem your soul. *For ye are not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers...(1Pet. 1:18).*

In the light of the temporal and corrupt nature of this world and all it contains, James is saying, be patient and establish your hearts. Let your hearts be fixed on the things above. Let your affections be fixed on Christ and His kingdom. Psalm 62:10 *Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart [upon them].* By way of contrast, Col 3:2: *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

So the first thing we must do to establish our hearts before God is to see the temporal nature of the riches of this world so we refrain from setting our hearts on them and make sure our hearts are set on things above. Next we establish our hearts before God:

II. By Seeing the Truth that Christ is Coming –

James draws a very close connection to endurance or patience and Christ's return. Look at v. 7 – *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.* Then look at v. 8 *Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.* You see how in both verses James makes the connection between patience, establishing your hearts, and the second coming of Christ.

It's a shame that such a glorious truth has in a sense been victimized by so many prophecy experts who see fulfilled prophecy in every news headline. I'm quite content with the view of our church and denomination that a man is free to work out the details of his own prophetic understanding.

It makes for interesting conversations and debates between the ministers and various members of the church. If you love to debate prophecy be sure to visit our brother Reggie Kimbro in Winston Salem. He loves to put forward his historic premillennial, non-dispensational view of Christ's return.

When I was ordained many years ago we had 3 of our ministers on the platform along with one of the elders from Malvern and we sang that paraphrase from Isa. 2 *Behold the mountain of the Lord in latter days shall rise – On mountain tops above the hills, and draw the wondering eyes.*

And while we were singing this paraphrase John Wagner leaned over to the rest of us and said *there's nothing like a good premillennial portion of God's word to sing!* Of course you couldn't convince Dr. Allison that this portion of scripture taught premillennialism. And I certainly didn't pick that paraphrase to sing because I thought it taught premillennialism. I love the thought behind this portion of God's word that Christ's kingdom will prevail and Christ will build His church!

So we can debate and discuss the issues that surround the coming of Christ and until redemption actually runs its course none of us need yield to the other on our varying views of prophecy. It won't be until these things actually are fulfilled that everyone will come to see that I'm right we all say to each other.

But amidst the speculations and debates and discussions there is one element that unifies us all. We all believe that Christ is coming. We all believe that this world will at last be redeemed from the curse under which it now groans. There is coming a new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

How I long for the day when that stanza will be fulfilled that tells us – *No strife shall rage, nor hostile feuds disturb those peaceful years; to ploughshares men shall beat their swords, to pruning hooks their spears. No longer hosts encountering hosts shall crowds of slain deplore: They hang the trumpet in the hall, and study war no more.*

Oh how we need to fix our hearts on that glorious truth when we live as we now do in the midst of wars and rumors of wars. Peter draws one of the most practical applications

from the doctrine of the 2nd coming of Christ in {2Pet. 3:10-14}. When I hear of Christians being executed by ISIS and of Christian businesses being coerced to conform their businesses to political correctness, these things make me long for Christ's return.

When I learn of a Southport police officer that is attempting to rescue a couple of men in a crashed car that has flipped on its roof only to have those trapped in that car shoot him and kill him, it makes me long for the day when Christ will come and put an end to the world's sin. When I see the sins that yet abide in my own heart and my seeming ineffectiveness to overcome them the way I long to it makes me long for the day when Christ will return and we'll be delivered at last from the very presence of sin.

When I consider the coldness and the deadness and spiritual apathy that often times prevails in my own life it leads me to long for the day when Christ will return and we'll be made perfectly blessed to the full enjoying of God forever.

That day will come. Thank God it's coming. We don't know when but we do know that we're closer now than we were yesterday. Fix your hearts on that truth, brothers and sisters in Christ, and it will enable you to be patient and to persevere in your faith. That glorious truth of Christ's return and all that it entails will enable you to stablish your hearts before the Lord.

And then consider with me next that we establish our hearts:

III. By Considering the Prophets and God's Ultimate Purpose of Mercy – {vv. 10,11}.

I'm glad Job is singled out by James because he demonstrates so clearly God's purpose of mercy. Job, you know, endured a severe and prolonged trial of affliction. He lost his wealth. He lost his health. He lost his family. You could say in a sense he lost his friends because they didn't deal with him rightly.

Circumstances were against him. His own wife was against him. The devil was against him. His friends were against him. And because of all these forces that were against him it made Job wonder why God was against him. But in fact God was for him. That's the amazing thing about the book. There was never a time when God was not for him. His friends would search in vain for the reason God was against him because in the end God vindicated Job and made it plain that He was for Job and He was with Job even though Job for quite a time could not detect Him.

And God was only giving to Job a slight taste of what Christ would endure to the full. Christ would be the One to experience God's wrath. Christ would be the One to bear the penalty of our sins. Christ would be the One who would save us from our sins. You remember how Job initially called upon God to curse the day of his birth? God would answer that prayer but he'd answer it by allowing Christ to become a curse for us.

And in the end of the book of Job we learn that God had a purpose of grace and mercy behind it all. The whole time of trial and afflictions for Job was preparation for even

greater manifestations of God's presence and grace. If you find yourself in such circumstances today you should consider it from that perspective – God is preparing you for great mercies. God has in store for you great blessings. And they'll fill your heart so full, that like Paul you'll view your afflictions as light afflictions that work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2Cor. 4:17).

So when you find yourselves in the midst of circumstances that seem so dire and difficult – circumstances that you don't understand – circumstances that make you wonder whether or not God is even with you – James tells you to consider the prophets. Consider that you are not going through anything that Christ doesn't know about. He's led others down that same path. And He leads us down such paths because He Himself would tread that path.

I know I've said it before but I never get tired of repeating it. It's one of my favorite views of the cross of Christ. We have the benefit of our Bibles and hundreds of years of church history to explain the cross of Christ to us. But the ones who were on hand at the time Christ was crucified didn't understand any of it.

It seemed like tragedy to them. It seemed like the triumph of sin and apostasy to them. They couldn't see how any good could come from it. And yet out of such tragedy and defeat God brought forth the greatest triumph of all time – even our salvation.

When you find yourselves, therefore, in circumstances of tragedy and seeming defeat you need to consider that you're not really in such a strange place after all. Christ has already been down that path and He proves to us that He is able to bring the greatest triumph out of the greatest tragedy. Fix your hearts, then, on those that have gone before you and consider that in their trials they, like you, were being conformed to the image of Christ. And if you can read your trials in that light then you'll believe that God's purpose toward you no matter how severe it seems now ultimately will reveal to you at last that God is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

So we establish our hearts by seeing the temporal nature of the things of this world. We establish our hearts by realizing that coming of the Lord draws near. We establish our hearts by considering the prophets and God's ultimate purpose of mercy. Finally we establish our hearts:

IV. By Maintaining Simple Integrity – {v. 12}

The call in this verse is for the simple integrity of faith. It's interesting isn't it that James prioritizes this exhortation. *Above all things* he says keep your word and practice integrity.

In 2Cor. 11:3 Paul writes – *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

We need to maintain simplicity in our doctrine; simplicity in our practice; and simplicity in our defense of the faith. The battle lines are drawn along this line of our simplicity. The devil wants to make religion complicated. The devil wants to convince us that our simple faith and practice is inadequate for this high tech age and its complex problems. You need solutions beyond the simple truths of the gospel. You need solutions more adequately designed for this busy world. You need the help of drugs or you need the help of psychology or you need the help of some highly trained specialist.

I don't believe it. I think life at the end of the day is simple. I think our problems are simple. Most often they can be explained in a word – sin. And just as sin is the problem the gospel is the answer. Christ died for your sins. This truth should enable you to maintain simplicity in your actions and in your words.

We don't rule out the use of vows or oaths under extreme circumstances. But you may recall from the accounts in the gospels that the Jewish practice had become one of swearing by varying degrees upon various issues. *He who swears by the temple it is nothing – but he who swears by the gold of the temple – he is bound* – the Jews reasoned.

This practice of adding degrees of solemnity to an oath robbed their religion of simplicity and defiled their religion. James calls for a return to simplicity – the simplicity of our words and actions which spring from the simplicity of our faith.

By maintaining the simple faith of believing in Christ our hearts can be established and we can persevere in our faith. So we must tend to our hearts. Christianity is a religion of the heart. Proverbs 4:23 *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it [are] the issues of life.*

And we do so by staying detached from this world. We must use it without abusing it and we must not allow our hearts to be lured away from Christ by it. We do so by considering that Christ will return – His return draws nigh. Are you ready to meet Him? Are you clothed with His righteousness? Have your sins been imputed to Him and His righteousness to you?

Consider God's servants and walk in the simplicity of your faith and by so doing the practice of pure religion will be your portion. Your heart will be established and you will patiently persevere and you will be counted indeed you'll count yourself to be happy and blessed.