

## **THE BOOK OF JAMES - 5**

### **5:1-20 Faith Tested**

#### **The Challenge of Chapter Five**

We must guard against pursuing wealth and depending on money more than God. When we experience oppression and pressure, we need to avoid the temptation to complain and gripe against one another. We do not need to swear by anything; our yes should mean yes and our no should mean no.

As Job endured suffering with patience, so we must also in your. If we are weak in our faith, we can ask the elders of the church to anoint us with oil and pray for us. At the same time, we should strive to be strong in our faith and certain we have no unconfessed sin between us and another believer. Then we can pray fervently and see answers to our prayers. Finally, we must always be sensitive and open to leading a brother or sister who has turned away, back to the Lord.

#### **1. Faith Tested by Its Reaction to Injustice (1-11)**

James begins by addressing the arrogant, unbelieving, wealthy residents of Jerusalem who are oppressing the poor. He is also speaking to believers who have become caught up in the pursuit of wealth and trust in money more than the God they serve. James continues by exhorting the oppressed believers to wait in patience and to stabilize their own hearts through the intake and application of the Word of God. He also instructs them not to grumble against one another because of the oppression and pressure they are experiencing in their lives, but instead to endure even as Job had in his life.

##### **A. Announcement of the Judgment**

**Jas 5:1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.**

Go to (come) now, ye rich men, weep (klausate: sob aloud) and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

This chapter is a sharp change from chapter 4. The unbelieving rich in this city who oppress the poor are being addressed. They are mentioned in chapter 2 as those who come into the church and receive special attention. They oppress the poor through the court systems and take advantage of situations for their furtherance of wealth (2:2-6). James is not opposed to them because they are wealthy, but because of their arrogance towards and sins against the poor.

James is explaining that there will always be social evils in the world and as believers, we are to be opposed to them, but not to the exclusion of the Great Commission.

The accumulation of wealth often leads to abuses, and James is not only coming down hard on believers, but he is also exhorting believers not to get caught up in the pursuit of wealth. Specifically, those being addressed are Jewish unbelievers who own large estates in the city of Jerusalem. They control much of the business activity that goes on in the city and have a stranglehold on a significant portion of the lives of the people.

James does not even appeal to their need for repentance and salvation in this verse, but to the coming destruction they will face; the miseries that will come upon them will be soon and eternal. Soon because Jerusalem will be destroyed at the coming of the Roman legions. James has already begun to see prophecy coming to pass and knows the destruction of the city is imminent (Daniel 9:26; Luke 21: 20-24). Eternal because they will stand before God's great white throne in judgment for their rejection of Jesus as Lord and also for their works in the earth.

"Weep" is used in other verses for sobbing aloud for the dead (Luke 7:13; John 11: 31-33) and for shame and remorse (Matthew 26:75; Luke 7:38).

## **B. Description of the Judgment**

### **Jas 5:2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.**

Jesus spoke of this in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-20). The analogy was the same as it is in James. The person who seeks after riches will eventually lose them. Those who seek first (primarily) the kingdom of God will have all of the necessities of life added to them by the Lord (Matthew 6:34). God not only wants to take care of our spiritual needs, but also our natural needs (Philippians 4:19). Those in Jerusalem who had sought after riches (and had oppressed those in the city) were now about to lose those riches. In God's sight, they have already become corrupted and their beautiful clothes were eaten by moths.

Riches in this earth are subject to inflation, recession, and depression. When riches are put into God's kingdom, they will not be lost to the money systems of the world but will last forever, winning souls and bringing eternal rewards!

### **Jas 5:3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.**

Your gold and silver is cankered (rusted); and the rust of them shall be a witness against you and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

The coming days of judgment will cause the gold and silver of James's congregation to become worthless. During the invasion of Rome, their gold and silver will be stolen and taken into the camp of the soldiers. Looting will be rampant and the whole scale of values which once existed will be gone. Also, in the day of judgment in heaven, all forms of earthly riches will be gone and worthless.

The issue again here is not the riches, but the scale of values behind them. The attitude, not the possessions, is the subject matter of this epistle by James. The rust on the treasures would be a testimony against them: just as natural forces eat up earthly treasures, so a wrong attitude can destroy values and eat up a life like fire.

The pain of fire is compared to the pain of losing all of the foundations of life. The only foundation of life that will always stand is the rock of the Word of God (Matthew 7:24-25). The final indictment of verse 3 says they have hoarded up treasures against the last day. These men have set aside treasures for the end of their lives as a guarantee and safeguard against unforeseen trouble (Matthew 6:19-21). When a person puts all of his trust in money for the assurance of his life, he will be disappointed. There are many things in life that cannot be predicted and the only safeguard we have is the promises of God.

### **C. Charges of the Judgment**

**Jas 5:4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.**

This is one of the strongest attacks in the New Testament on the treatment of the poor and working-class. Since Palestine was dominated by an agricultural economy, most of the work done was in the harvest fields. The rich owned the fields, and the people of the city reaped in them. The rich, at the time of this writing, were oppressing and keeping the laborers in poverty by underpaying them. The Word has never stood for workers rebelling or uniting together as a union for better working conditions (Matthew 20:1-7), but God has always instructed bosses to treat the workers fairly.

Those in Jerusalem at this time should have known better because they had the law, which instructed them in the proper treatment of workers (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24: 14-15). The prophets also spoke out against this in their writings (Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5).

James is saying that the injustice against these workers is crying out and he was a voice united with them against the bosses of the day. Many in James's congregation are being affected by this treatment because they are laborers in the field. The cries were being heard by the Lord of Sabaoth, also known as the Lord of Hosts (Romans 9:29).

The Lord of Hosts is an Old Testament Jewish title for the Lord as captain of His armies of angels. The revenge factor is being emphasized; God watches over His own and hears the cries of injustice by His people. The title “Lord of Hosts” appears twenty-three times alone in the book of Malachi in reference to the coming deliverance of the Jews at Armageddon.

Whether or not the bosses of that day listened to the cries of the people, The Lord of Hosts did. When a person is being mistreated and underpaid on their job, they can cry out to the Lord of Hosts and He will hear their cry and will rescue them with angelic armies.

**Jas 5:5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.**

You have lived in pleasure (etraphesate: luxury) on the earth, and have been wanton (espatalesate: wastefully indulgent); ye have nourished (ethrepsate: fattened) your hearts, as in the day of slaughter.

The first analogy of living in luxury is the rich man dressed in purple and fine linen (Luke 16:19). The rich in James’s day were living in the finest luxury while the workers were starving -- like Lazarus outside the door, waiting for crumbs.

“Wanton” in the King James Version speaks of the wasteful indulgence of the rich like the prodigal son who wasted his inheritance on riotous living (Luke 15:13). No regard was given to stewardship or to using a portion of their money to help the poor of the land, as was commanded in the law. Neither did they pay their field workers what was just, as was also commanded in the law.

James finally views these men as being “nourished” or “fattened up” as cattle for slaughter. Just as the cow has no knowledge of the coming day when it will be killed, so these men were enjoying the riches of life not knowing they were going to be slaughtered in the coming days at the invasion of Rome.

**Jas 5:6 Ye have condemned *and* killed the just; *and* he doth not resist you.**

Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

The greatest indictment against the controlling rich of Jerusalem was that they had been condemning the believers of the city and killing them for their belief in the Lord Jesus. Since they controlled the court system (2:6), they had not only used it for financial gain but also for religious.

Those being condemned and killed for their stand before the Lord had not resisted the judgment because they faced death as Jesus Himself did (1 Peter 2:21-23).

#### **D. Exhortation to the Afflicted Brothers**

**Jas 5:7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.**

Be patient (makrothumeia: long tempered) therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

This is the breath of fresh air for the believers who are oppressed in Jerusalem. They are to be patient and wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus to the earth, the second advent. That is the time when all injustice will end, and recompense will be made for sin. Being patient is commanded in the Word as an attribute of maturity and an attribute of God Himself (Matthew 18:23-33; Romans 2:4, 9:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Peter 2:20; 2 Peter 3:9).

The example of patience is a farmer who, after planting the seed, waits for the time of harvest. The waiting is easier knowing what is coming in a few weeks and months. He waits for signs in the heavens, which let him know that harvest is coming soon. For the farmer, the signs are the former and latter rains that come to Palestine in the spring and fall of the year. The people of James's day are the farmers who are looking for a different harvest: the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, which has been spoken of throughout the Old Testament and the gospels of Jesus.

**Jas 5:8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.**

Be ye also patient; stablish (sterixate: stabilized) your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

The command is for the people of the congregation to become patient and stabilize their own hearts. All of the proper tools have been given by the Lord to get the job done; people just need to put them into effect in their own personal lives. The way to become stabilized is through constant intake and application of the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 1 Peter 5:10).

Our patience and stability will pay off one day, for the Lord Jesus will return for us at the rapture and later to the earth at His second advent. James is not the only one who wrote of the coming of the Lord Jesus. He joins Paul, Peter, and John (1 Corinthians 15:51; Philippians 4:5; 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:13, 3:2-3). Patiently awaiting the coming of the Lord Jesus keeps us working for the Lord each day. We should not give up living for the Lord to simply wait for His return (1 Thessalonians 4:10-12; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).

**Jas 5:9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.**

Grudge (stenazete: stabilize) not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned (krino: murmur, grumble): behold, the judge standeth before the door.

The conditions for these believers are not easy; they are difficult. James is instructing them not to become irritable toward one another and began to grumble and gripe. It is often easy during a time of oppression to put the blame on others around you and get your eyes off the real issue. When we begin to gripe against each other, we stand before the Judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has warned us not to judge each other lest we be judged ourselves (Matthew 7:1-7; Luke 6:37). He presently stands before the doors, indicating the nearness of His arrival to the earth for the rapture and second advent. All of the oppression these believers are experiencing will be handled then and settled once and for all. In the meantime, they are to be patient, stabilized through the Word, and not to become angry toward each other.

**Jas 5:10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.**

James asks these believers to use the Word as their source of strength and patience in the time of suffering. The Old Testament prophets, and Jesus Himself, are the writers James is referring to (Matthew 5:12, 21:35-36, 22:6, 23:29-37; Luke 13:33). There are also many writers of the New Testament they were looking to (Acts 7:51-52; Romans 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 2:15; Hebrews 11:32-38; Revelation 16:6, 18:24).

No one ever survives a time of testing by Satan without the Word and patience. All of the heroes of faith found in the Word of God are there as examples for our lives (1 Corinthians 10:6).

**Jas 5:11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.**

Behold, we count them happy (makarios: blessed) which endure. Ye have heard of the patience (upomone: endurance) of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

There is a blessing attached to endurance under pressure. The blessing not only comes to the one who waits, but also to those who witness the long-suffering of the believer during trials and the rewards that come in the end.

The term “blessed” was also used in 1:12 to describe the reward of the steadfast believer during persecution. He was said to “receive the crown of life.”

This is the only place where Job is mentioned in all of the New Testament. Although his patience is not known, his endurance and steadfastness during trouble are. He complained and even spoke out falsely about God (Job 7:11-16, 10:18, 23:2, 30:20-23), but he did repent in the end and saw his troubles turned and his blessings restored (42:12-17). This outpouring of mercy James is referring to is waiting for the one who will steadfastly endure temptations.

It is interesting that James (unlike Peter) does not use the Lord Jesus as an example of faith, suffering, or unanswered prayer. He uses people who had failures in their lives, such as Abraham, Rahab, and Elijah, so we can be more encouraged when we think about our own failures. The Lord gives grace and mercy to those who follow Him patiently and steadfastly (Psalm 103:8).

### **E. Faith Tested by Its Reaction to Self-Serving Oaths (12)**

**Jas 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.**

But above (before) all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation (judgment).

This is the closing thought for this section and therefore important. James wants this to be the utmost thought and come before anything that has been said until now. This verse concludes the section on worldliness and our endurance in the midst of a world antagonistic toward the Christian way of life (4:1-5, 11). James tells us the same thing Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:34-37, 23: 16-20).

“Swearing” here is not cursing; it is taking oaths based on something bigger or stronger than the person making the oath. We do not have to lean on something bigger than ourselves to prop up our statement. We should be so dependable in our statements that when we say yes, we mean it and when we say no, we mean it. We do not have to add anything to cause people to believe us. We will face God’s judgment if our lives are not strong enough in themselves. If we have to depend on something else in our lives to be believable, God’s anger will be against us in this life and at the judgment seat of Christ.

### **2. Faith Tested by Its Resorting to Prayer (13-18)**

In this section of scripture, James concentrates on the importance and power of prayer. He points out that there will be those who are weak, not only physically but also in faith. For these people, it would be necessary to have the elders anoint them with oil and use their faith so that the weak person could receive healing and also forgiveness of sins. James did not want the one who was

weak to stay weak. Rather, he wanted them to become strong in faith like the elders who had prayed for them. He went on to exhort them that one of the main causes of sickness in the congregation was unconfessed sin between people and he encouraged these people.

#### **A. Prayer in Emotional Reactions**

**Jas 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.**

Is anyone among you afflicted (kakopatheî: suffering)? let him pray. Is any merry (cheerful)? Let him sing psalms (psalleteo: praises accompanied by music).

The affliction in this verse is not sickness; it is distress or suffering. The first place a person should turn for help in their “affliction” is to the Lord in prayer rather than to the world or even to the church or counsel. This person has reached a point of distress or oppression, the opposite of being “merry.”

The merry person is to sing psalms or praises accompanied by music. The Lord is the first place we should turn whether we are depressed and going through suffering or we are cheerful and singing songs. If we turn to the Lord at all times, both in oppression and cheer, our condition will not get worse. We can live in perpetual health, mentally and physically, when we focus our attention on the Lord in every situation. His Word is a continual medicine to our emotions and bodies (Proverbs 20: 20-24).

#### **B. Prayer for Believers’ Needs**

**Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:**

Is any sick (astheneî: sickly, weak from sickness) among you? Let him call for the elders (presbuteros: elders) of the church; and let them pray (proseuchomai) over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

The case James is alluding to here is sickness that is getting worse. This person should have had their attention on the Lord from the beginning but did not, and it has resulted in a sickness. God’s original intention was for us to be self-sufficient (5:13) and look to Him in every situation, good or bad. If we do not look to Him and become weak as a result, God does not throw us away or disregard us. He has given us the body of Christ to help us through. If there are any sick in the congregation, they can call for the elders of the church to pray for them, and God promises they will be raised up on the faith of those praying.

The Greek word for “sick” is astheneî, and it means “sickly, weak from sickness.” This person is not only sick, they are weak in faith and have little desire to pray for themselves. God’s desire is

for this person to be healed at any level of faith. The elders are to pray for the person by anointing them with oil, a type of the Holy Spirit's power in removal of sin and sickness. The prayer ends in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**Jas 5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.**

And the prayer of faith shall save (sozo) the sick (weak one), and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he hath committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

There is no question in James's mind of what will happen when this person is prayed for. He will be healed. The person who was weak in faith was raised up by the faith of those around. This does not mean that it is James's desire (or God's) for the people to stay weak in faith. Instead, his desire is to see them grow up and become strong just like the elders who prayed for them.

In addition to helping others in the congregation, elders and leaders are to be models of faith and maturity. The person prayed for will also have his sins forgiven. Having the elders pray the prayer of faith is not the usual way for sins to be forgiven; it usually occurs through 1 John 1:9, but only for the one who is strong enough to isolate his sin and confess it to the Lord. The weak person who calls on the elders will not only have their sickness healed but also have their sins forgiven.

**Jas 5:16 Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent (operative) prayer (deesis: supplication) of a righteous man availeth much (is strong and powerful).

James now comes to a root cause for sickness in the congregation; unconfessed sins between people. James is not advocating a public meeting for confessing sins, but a private time between believers who have wronged each other (Matthew 5:23-24). If sins are handled in private, and attention is kept on correct relationships between God and men, there will be no need for public prayer and anointing with oil.

But if there is no forgiveness between believers, there will be no healing. An operative prayer is one that has no unforgiveness between men and God. It is prayed in faith, trusting the promises of God and made in the name of Jesus. James has given us the steps for an operative prayer in the verses dealing with sickness in the congregation.

### **C. The Power of Godly Prayer**

**Jas 5:17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**

This verse stresses the human side of Elijah for the encouragement of his congregation. Since the congregation's faith was weak in many points and the elders had strong faith, it might appear that God was a respecter of persons for answered prayer. James is quick to note the human side of a hero they almost deified. This man was taken up in a chariot and will later come back to the earth for three and one half years as a herald of the second advent of Jesus. Yet he also had long days of depression and mood changes. He was subject to great defeats after great victories. By James pointing this out, his congregation could find themselves in Elijah. This man of great mistakes and defeats also had a great prayer answered that struck at the heart of the nation of Israel in its apostasy. Elijah becomes our example of a man who had an operative and fervent prayer.

Elijah is also James's fourth and last Old Testament character used for illustration. James uses so many Old Testament heroes because of the number of Jews in his congregation.

**Jas 5:18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.**

Although in the account of 1 Kings 18:41-45 there is no mention of Elijah praying, he must have by his posture in verse 42. James confirms that he did pray and God answered his prayer by sending rain. The answer came by persistence and patience, and the servant of Elijah finally saw a small cloud on the horizon that brought an abundance of rain.

### **3. Results of Turning a Believer Back to the Lord (19-20)**

James ends the chapter exhorting his congregation to be sensitive to those who have strayed from God and to look for opportunities to bring them back to the Lord.

**Jas 5:19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;**

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him (epistrepse: turn him around);

Any of us can err from the truth as Elijah did. Some have erred in the church at Jerusalem as James has just noted in the verses about praying for the sick.

Other spiritual believers are to be sensitive to those around who have erred and help bring them back into fellowship with the Lord (Galatians 6:1-5).

The term "convert" from the King James Version is used for the sinning believer. James is drawing a close analogy between the carnal believer and the sinner. The closing verse is even stronger.

**Jas 5:20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.**

Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner (sinning one) from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide (kalupsei: cover) a multitude of sins.

The ultimate end of sin in a believer's life is the sin unto death (1 John 5:16-17). This is early physical death, not spiritual death. When another believer restores the sinning Christian to fellowship with the Lord, he helps to keep him alive to serve the Lord longer on the earth. He also causes a multitude of sins to be covered by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7, 9). The sin unto death is in focus here because of the words "multitude of sins." The sin unto death is not one sin, but the final sin of a multitude, which brings the Lord's long-suffering to an end. The Corinthians were guilty of this during the Communion service and were promised by Paul that if they rightly discerned the Lord's body, they could have health restored and long life (1 Corinthians 11:30). James ends his book on a note of forgiveness and restoration to weak believers.

### **Chapter Summary**

James ends his letter by exhorting the unbelieving rich not to oppress the poor while, at the same time, encouraging the poor believers to endure pressure and oppression without complaining and griping against one another. He also encourages the congregation to stabilize their hearts by taking in and applying the Word of God to their lives. James explains the importance of prayer for the sick as well as the importance of effective and fervent prayer. He concludes by encouraging his people to have sensitive hearts, looking for opportunities to lead those who have strayed from the Lord back to Him.