

NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 5 (PT 1)

JAMES 5:1-12

JAMES 5:1-6 - WARNING TO THE RICH

Q - WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS SECTION? WHY DOES JAMES AGAIN RETURN TO THE SUBJECT OF RICH/POOR?

JESUS WASN'T JOKING WHEN HE SAID IT WAS "HARD FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (MATTHEW 19:23), AND HIS BROTHER JAMES' ISN'T PLAYING EITHER. HE CALLS FOR MOURNING AND WEeping BY THOSE WHO ARE "RICH". LET'S BREAKDOWN WHAT HE SAYS:

THE WARNING:

V. 1 - WEEP AND HOWL FOR THE MISERIES THAT ARE COMING (FIRST IMPLICATION OF JUDGMENT COMING)

V. 2 - RICHES HAVE ROTTED AND GARMENTS HAVE BEEN MOTH EATEN

V. 3A - THEIR GOLD AND SILVER HAS RUSTED, AND THAT RUST WILL SERVE AS A "WITNESS" AGAINST THEM ON JUDGMENT DAY. AND WITH THAT, JAMES BEGINS TO ACT LIKE AN ATTORNEY MAKING THEIR CASE AGAINST AN ACCUSED, THE ACCUSED IN THIS CASE IS THE RICH. GOLD AND SILVER TYPICALLY DON'T "RUST" BUT IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY, THEIR VALUE DOESN'T HOLD UP.

THE CASE:

V. 3B - OPENING LINE/SUMMARY STATEMENT: "IT IS IN THE LAST DAYS" THAT YOU HAVE STORED UP YOUR TREASURE

V. 4 - YOU HAVEN'T PAID THE POOR PEOPLE WORKING FOR YOU (WHO HAVE ALREADY DONE THE WORK) AND GOD HAS HEARD THEIR CRIES.

V. 5 - YOU HAVE LIVED LUXURIOSLY AND LIVED A LIFE OF WANTON (*WITHOUT CHECK OR LIMITATION*) PLEASURE.

V. 6 - YOU HAVE CONDEMNED AND PUT THE RIGHTEOUS TO DEATH, AND THEY HAVEN'T RESISTED YOU (MEANING, THEY HAVEN'T PUT UP A FIGHT AGAINST THE UNJUST CHARGES AGAINST THEM, WHICH MAKES THE CONDEMNATION EVEN MORE UNJUST).

Q - WHY IS THIS A CASE THAT NEEDS TO BE MADE?

Q - WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?

BEFORE WE TRY TO ASSESS WHO IS RICH AND WHO IS POOR IN OUR CULTURAL CONTEXT - LET'S THINK ABOUT JAMES' MAIN POINT - ARE WE LIVING IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY OR THIS AGE? ONE WAY FOR US TO ANSWER THIS IS TO LOOK AT OUR "CHECKBOOKS" (ONLINE BANKING STATEMENT??). WE HAVE TO LIVE, EAT, PAY BILLS ETC - EVERYONE DOES - BUT WHAT DOES HOW WE SPEND OUR MONEY SAY ABOUT OUR HEART AND LIVES? ARE WE GENEROUS? ARE WE LIVING IN LUXURY? ARE WE CONTENT? ARE WE SERVING GOD WITH OUR RESOURCES AND STORING UP TREASURE IN "HEAVEN" OR STORING UP TREASURE TO USE NOW?

V. 4 - LORD OF SABAOth - THIS THE ENGLISH transliteration OF THE GREEK VERSION OF WHAT WE COMMONLY READ IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AS "LORD OF HOSTS" (USED OVER 230X IN OT)

THIS IS THE "BATTLE NAME" OF GOD. KIND OF LIKE REFERRING TO THE PRESIDENT AS "COMMANDER IN CHIEF" IT'S A TITLE WHICH REMINDS PEOPLE OF THEIR MILITARY POSITION AND AUTHORITY. AND IT IS REFERENCED HERE BY JAMES TO REMIND BOTH THE UNJUST RICH AND THE AFFLICTED POOR THAT THE WARRIOR GOD SEES AND THE WARRIOR GOD WILL RESPOND.

JAMES 4:7-9 - ENCOURAGING REMINDER TO THE RIGHTEOUS

V. 7-8A - BE PATIENT

V. 8B - STRENGTHEN YOUR HEARTS...JESUS IS COMING

V. 9A - DO NOT COMPLAIN (SO YOU'RE NOT JUDGED)

V. 9B - THE JUDGE IS STANDING RIGHT AT THE DOOR

THE WORD ABOUT THE "JUDGE STANDING RIGHT AT THE DOOR" WOULD BE BOTH CONFRONTING AND COMFORTING. IN THIS CASE, THE LORD'S NEARNESS IS JUDGMENT. CONFRONTING FOR THOSE CALLED OUT IN V. 1-6 AS WELL AS THOSE CHRISTIANS WHO ARE COMPLAINING AND GROANING. COMFORTING FOR THOSE IN NEED OF THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF V. 7-11, FOR IN THIS CASE THE LORD'S NEARNESS IS SALVATION.

JUST LIKE A FARMER PLANTS SEEDS AND IT TAKES TIME FOR A HARVEST, SO WE WAIT FOR THE RETURN OF JESUS. IT WILL HAPPEN, THOUGH HE TARRIES. THE FARMER MUST WAIT TILL THE HARVEST GROWS AND BE CONFIDENT OF THE GROWTH AND FRUIT THAT WILL COME. WE TOO HAVE TO BE PATIENT - AND ALSO "STRENGTHEN OUR HEARTS". WHAT WE CAN'T DO IS "COMPLAIN" (*ARE WE THERE YET?*) ESPECIALLY AGAINST EACH OTHER AS WE WAIT.

Q - HOW CAN YOU HELP "STRENGTHEN" THE HEART OF OTHERS?

JAMES 4:10-11 - YOU'RE IN GOOD COMPANY

THIS LIKELY REMINDS YOU OF WHAT JESUS TAUGHT US IN HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT:

MATTHEW 5:10-12 - "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. 11 "BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN PEOPLE INSULT YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU, AND FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU BECAUSE OF ME. 12 "REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IN HEAVEN IS GREAT; FOR IN THE SAME WAY THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU.

JAMES ENCOURAGES THE CHRISTIAN ENDURING SUFFERING IN TWO WAYS.

1 - REMEMBER THAT THE PROPHETS BEFORE YOU SUFFERED AND WE LOOK AT THEM AS OUR HEROES NOW. YOU'RE DOING THE SAME THING THEY DID! PERHAPS THE GENERATIONS TO COME WILL LOOK AT YOUR EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW!

2 - REMEMBER HOW THINGS TURNED OUT FOR JOB! JOB SUFFERED GREATLY AND IN THE END GOD CARED FOR JOB. WE CAN/SHOULD LOOK AT HIS EXAMPLE AND REMEMBER THE LORD'S COMPASSION AND MERCY, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL.

IN BOTH CASES, JAMES CALLS US TO LOOK BACK TO WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST, GOD'S TRACK RECORD AND THE EXAMPLE OF THE FAITHFUL BEFORE US. THIS IS A GREAT ADMONITION. WHEN WE ARE IN TRIALS, LOOKING AROUND US MAY LEAD TO DISCOURAGEMENT - BUT LOOKING BACK AT HOW GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR/BEEN WITH/LOVED US/HIS PEOPLE IN THE PAST SHOULD GIVE US THE STRENGTH TO ENDURE WHAT WE DEAL WITH TODAY. IN ADDITION WE LOOK AHEAD AT WHAT IS COMING TO KNOW THERE WILL BE AN END TO SUFFERING AND TRIAL. PAUL WOULD SUM UP THIS BACKWARDS/FORWARD PERSPECTIVE WELL:

ROMANS 15:4 - FOR WHATEVER WAS WRITTEN IN EARLIER TIMES (*THE STORIES OF THE PAST*) WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION, SO THAT THROUGH PERSEVERANCE AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SCRIPTURES WE MIGHT HAVE HOPE (*GOOD EXPECTATION OF THE FUTURE*)

JAMES 5:12 - SMALL WORDS WITH BIG IMPACT

IT MAY NOT SEEM OBVIOUS WHY THIS VERSE FOLLOWS THE DISCUSSION IN VERSE 1-11. WHY TRANSITION FROM A CONVERSATION ABOUT JUDGEMENT, LIVING IN LIGHT OF THE END OF THE AGE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PATIENT ENDURANCE TO "DON'T MAKE OATHS"?

SIMILARLY JESUS TAUGHT THIS ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT:

MATTHEW 5:33-37 - "AGAIN, YOU HAVE HEARD THAT THE ANCIENTS WERE TOLD, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.' 34 "BUT I SAY TO YOU, MAKE NO OATH AT ALL, EITHER BY HEAVEN, FOR IT IS THE THRONE OF GOD, 35 OR BY THE EARTH, FOR IT IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF HIS FEET, OR BY JERUSALEM, FOR IT IS THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 "NOR SHALL YOU MAKE AN OATH BY YOUR HEAD, FOR YOU CANNOT MAKE ONE HAIR WHITE OR BLACK. 37 "BUT LET YOUR STATEMENT BE, 'YES, YES ' OR 'NO, NO'; ANYTHING BEYOND THESE IS OF EVIL.

WHAT JESUS AND NOW JAMES WERE SPEAKING ON WAS INTEGRITY. WEBSTER'S DEFINES INTEGRITY AS "*THE QUALITY OF BEING HONEST AND HAVING STRONG MORAL PRINCIPLES;*" THE WORD INTEGRITY "EVOLVED FROM THE LATIN ADJECTIVE *INTEGER*, MEANING WHOLE OR COMPLETE. (*THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE*, 4TH ED.). INTEGRITY IS THE "INNER SENSE OF "WHOLENESS" DERIVING FROM QUALITIES SUCH AS HONESTY AND CONSISTENCY OF CHARACTER (WIKIPEDIA)."

YOU SEE MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, BEING READY FOR THE END OF THE AGE AND THE JUDGMENT STARTS IN THE SMALL CHOICES AND DECISIONS WE MAKE EVERY DAY. SAYING WHAT YOU MEAN AND MEANING WHAT YOU SAY - AND FOLLOWING THROUGH WITH THAT WORD - IS NOT A MINOR DETAIL OF OUR LIVES, DIVORCED FROM OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE. I WOULD ARGUE (WITH THE HELP OF JESUS AND JAMES' OWN TEACHING) THAT IT IS YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE. WE ARE KNOWN BY OUR WORDS AND HOW WE ACT IN LIGHT OF THOSE WORDS.

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT INTEGRITY IS "DOING THE RIGHT THING EVEN WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING." WITH THAT UNDERSTANDING, CAN WE SEE WHY JAMES CALLS US TO BE MEN AND WOMEN OF INTEGRITY AS WE WAIT FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST? IN A WORLD FILLED WITH DECEPTION AND FRAUD, WE WILL SHINE AS PEOPLE OF TRUTH AND FAITHFULNESS, NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCE.

WE MAY NOT BE RICH BUT WE WILL HAVE HONOR. WE MAY HAVE TRIAL BUT WE WILL BE RELIABLE. THESE ARE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES WORTH FIGHTING FOR. PERHAPS JAMES WROTE "ABOVE ALL..." ON THIS SUBJECT BECAUSE IF WE MISS THE NEED TO HAVE INTEGRITY, WHAT OTHER VIRTUES WILL WE BE WILLING TO FORSAKE?

THERE IS MUCH DISCUSSION IN THE CHURCH TODAY ABOUT THE END TIMES AND BEING "READY" FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD. SOME BUILD SHELTER, STOCK UP CANNED GOOD AND BUY IODINE TABLETS JUST TO BE PREPARED. OTHERS HIT THE STREETS WITH BULL HORNS AND SIGNS CALLING THE MASSES TO "REPENT FOR THE END IS NEAR". OTHERS DO NOTHING BELIEVING THAT THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO, SO WHAT'S THE POINT. AND OTHERS DO EVERYTHING ELSE IN BETWEEN.

JAMES HOWEVER TAKES A DIFFERENT APPROACH. AND IT'S SURPRISING TO US WHO ARE USED TO DRAMATIC OVER-REACTIONS DRIVEN BY FEAR. MAKE NO MISTAKE, JAMES CALLS THOSE IN SIN TO REPENTANCE (THE WEEPING AND HOWLING OF JAMES 5:1 AREN'T TO BE IGNORED).

INDEED JAMES SAYS - THE LORD IS COMING - GET READY! BUT THEN HE CALLS THE CHRISTIANS TO THE FOLLOWING:

BE PATIENT. WAIT. STRENGTHEN YOU HEARTS. DON'T COMPLAIN. BE GENEROUS AND KIND. KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE HOPE. AND BE PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY. RATHER THAN OBSESSING OVER WHAT LATEST TECHNOLOGICAL INVENTION IS THE "MARK OF THE BEAST" JAMES SAYS - STAY FAITHFUL CHURCH. LOVE PEOPLE. DON'T FREAK OUT, KEEP LIVING FOR CHRIST. DON'T MESS AROUND IN THE WORLD - KEEP THE FAITH UNTO THE END.

WHETHER JESUS COMES IN OUR LIFETIME OR NOT, THESE TRUTHS TRANSCEND THE GENERATIONS. THESE SIMPLE AND CRITICALLY IMPORTANT THINGS ARE WHAT OUR LIVES SHOULD BE ABOUT. THEY ARE SIMPLE AND CLEAR AND FOR EACH OF US. THE KEY TO BEING READY TO FACE JESUS IS NOT FOUND IN BEING CRAZY OR EXTREME - IT'S FOUND IN LOVING GOD WITH OUR HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH, AND LOVING OTHERS. GET BUSY DOING ~~THAT~~ AND YOU'LL BE READY TO FACE THE LORD.