

**JAMES: FAITH THAT WORKS**  
***How Do We Live in This World?***

**James 5:1-20**

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Good morning. Toby Smith will be reading James 5:13-16 for us this morning.

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5:13-16

The verses Toby just read are among some of the most well-known words in James' letter. They emphasize the importance of different types of prayer—personal prayer, prayers for healing and prayers of repentance and confession. I frequently quote those verses when I anoint someone with oil who is sick and pray asking God for their healing. We'll look more closely at those words later, but I thought they'd be appropriate words to have read as I begin the last sermon in our series on James.

Have you ever thought about what an odd thing preaching is? Probably not as much as I have, because I prepare messages and stand up here to preach each week. Think about this. In a culture that's super busy and fast-paced, several hundred of us gather each week to sit quietly in rows and listen for half an hour or so as a man or woman standing on a platform preaches to us from a book which was written nearly 2,000 years ago. Why we do this? Have you ever wondered that?

We listen to the Bible, God's Word, because we believe these words aren't just ink on a page, they're living and active. We listen because we believe the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through these words. We listen because we're convinced these words explain the life of Jesus and point us toward his truth. We listen—and this is why I preach—so we can understand better who God is and so we align our lives and be transformed by the truth of God's Word and by the person of Jesus Christ.

James wrote this letter that we've studied the past 6 weeks to help 1<sup>st</sup> Century followers of Jesus who were living just 20-30 years after Jesus' life and death and resurrection understand

better how they were to live in the world as they lived in the uncertain space between Jesus' time on earth and his return for his Church. Nineteen hundred and fifty years have passed, but our challenge remains the same: How do we live in this world as followers of Jesus who know as the old Gospel song says, *"This world is not my home. I'm just a-passing through?"* Listen to James' answer to that question as I read James chapter 5 from The MESSAGE Paraphrase...

And a final word to you arrogant rich: Take some lessons in lament. You'll need buckets for the tears when the crash comes upon you. Your money is corrupt and your fine clothes stink. Your greedy luxuries are a cancer in your gut, destroying your life from within. You thought you were piling up wealth. What you've piled up is judgment.

All the workers you've exploited and cheated cry out for judgment. The groans of the workers you used and abused are a roar in the ears of the Master Avenger. You've looted the earth and lived it up. But all you'll have to show for it is a fatter than usual corpse. In fact, what you've done is condemn and murder perfectly good persons, who stand there and take it.

Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that. Stay steady and strong. The Master could arrive at any time.

Friends, don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner.

Take the old prophets as your mentors. They put up with anything, went through everything, and never once quit, all the time honoring God. What a gift life is to those who stay the course! You've heard, of course, of Job's staying power, and you know how God brought it all together for him at the end. That's because God cares, cares right down to the last detail.

And since you know that he cares, let your language show it. Don't add words like "I swear to God" to your own words. Don't show your impatience by concocting oaths to hurry up God. Just say yes or no. Just say what is true. That way, your language can't be used against you.

Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.

Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.

My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God. The MESSAGE

James has been addressing the question, *"How do we live in this world?"* all through his letter, but he sharpens his focus even more as he concludes his writing in chapter 5. I'd like us to walk through this closing chapter section by section to see how James answers this question for us. I'll begin by reading verses 1-6.

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. <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. <sup>4</sup>Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup>You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you. James 5:1-6

**How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world?** James begins the chapter by reminding his readers of something he has pointed out throughout his letter—that wealth and the material things we value in this world are fleeting, they don't last. Wealth rots, moths eat cloths and gold and silver corrode. Material possessions and the things we hoard don't last and the very fact that they corrode testify against us.

And James couples the foolishness of trying to hoard wealth with the fact that the wealthy are mistreating the poor who work for them. If we can't take wealth with us, it would make sense that we generously give to others and pursue mercy and justice for those who have less than us, but instead, James condemns those who live in luxury and self-indulgence and ignore the broken and hurting and poor who are all around them. He points out that the cries of those who are being taken advantage of will be heard by God and He will judge those who indulge themselves and ignore the needy around them. How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world? **We're called to be generous to the poor and needy around us, understanding we can't take our wealth with us.** Let's look now at verses 7-11.

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup>You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup>Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

<sup>10</sup>Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>As you know, we count as 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 5:7-11

**How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world?** James tells his readers in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century (and us) to **Patiently await Jesus' coming.** He uses the analogy of a farmer who waits all year for the land to produce a crop. And he challenges us as we wait not to grumble against each other. James understands that our impatience—having to wait longer than we want for what we're waiting for—often leads us to grumble and quarrel with those around us. James uses the Old Testament prophets and Job as examples of people who waited patiently even

though they had to walk through much difficulty before they received what they were waiting for. And James closes this section by reminding us that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. That's a great reminder for us, because as we wait and grow impatient waiting, it's easy to begin questioning God's compassion and his love for us. We begin to wonder if God cares about us or if He has forgotten us.

Verse 12 stands alone. *"Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned."* James 5:12

How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world? We're called to be people of integrity. Have you ever been talking with someone for a while and then they said, *"To be honest with you..."* When I hear that I want to say, *"So, have you been lying to me up to this point?"* Other times you might hear someone say, *"I swear to God,"* or *"I swear on my grandmother's grave."* Oaths like that seem to indicate we can't trust that person's normal speech—that unless they make some brash statement, we should be skeptical of how truthful they are. James very simply instructs his readers to let their "yes" be "yes" and their "no" be "no." In a world where deception and half truths are common, our integrity and truthfulness can set us apart as followers of Jesus.

Now we come to the verses Toby read for us.

<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <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 person is powerful and effective.

<sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being, even as we are. 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 5:13-18

How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world? These are some of the most powerful words on prayer that we find in the New Testament. James tells us to pray no matter what is happening in our lives—when we're in trouble, prayer; when we're happy, worship; when we're sick, ask the elders of the church to pray for us; and, when we've sinned, confess our sin and have others pray for us. How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world? We're called to be people of prayer. In these verses James instructs those who are sick to have the

elders of the church anoint them with oil and pray for them. I share this verse with people who are ill sometimes when I ask them if I can anoint them with oil and pray for them. And I remind them that the oil doesn't have magical powers. It's a symbol of the Holy Spirit's presence as I or others pray for them.

In verse 16 James writes, *"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."* And he goes on to highlight the example of Elijah, who told King Ahab that because of his and Israel's unfaithfulness to God there wouldn't be dew or rain in the land until Elijah prayed for rain, and there was a severe drought for 3 & ½ years.

And James wraps up chapter 5 and his letter with these words...

<sup>19</sup> My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, <sup>20</sup> remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. James 5:19 & 20

How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world? James concludes his letter by telling his readers We're responsible to help brothers and sisters stay faithful to God. If someone wanders away we're responsible to help bring them back, and when we're able to help someone turn from the error of their ways we save them and possibly others from following their wrong path.

James covers a lot of ground in this chapter addressing the question, How are followers of Jesus called to live in this world? Since I highlighted 5 different responses to that question, I wanted to recap them for you.

We're called to be generous to the poor and needy around us, understanding we can't take our wealth with us.

We are to patiently await Jesus' coming.

We're called to be people of integrity.

We're called to be people of prayer.

We're responsible to help our brothers and sisters stay faithful to God.

As I read over those and as they are listed on the screens beside me, I encourage you to ask God to identify which one of those is most pertinent for you. Which of those is He identifying for you in response to the question, *"How are followers of Jesus called to live in this*

*world?"* I'll give you a moment to prayerfully reflect on those and then we're going to receive Communion together.

As we receive Communion today, we remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us by giving his life on the cross and as we've studied James these past 6 weeks, I encourage each of us to recommit ourselves to living our lives for Jesus in this world.