

An Exegesis of James Five

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James Five: Closing Admonitions

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Translation

- (1-6) Come now you who are rich wail and cry aloud over your tribulation which shall come. Your riches have rotted and your clothing has become moth eaten. Your gold and silver have become corroded, and the rust will be a testimony against you, and will eat your flesh as fire. You have stored up treasures for the last days. Behold the wages of the workers who harvested your fields, which you fraudulently withheld, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters has come into the ears of the Lord of hosts. You led a life of self-indulgence on the earth and you lived in luxury, you made your heart fat unto the day of slaughter. You condemned, you killed the innocent. He offers you no resistance.
- (7-11) Be patient, brethren, until the Lord's coming. Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, having patience for it, until he receive the early and late rain. You be patient also, strengthen your heart, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Brethren, do not complain about one another, lest you be judged. The Judge is now standing before the door. Brethren, take the prophets, who called upon the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them fortunate who endure. You have heard about the patience of Job, and you know the goal of the Lord, (you know) that the Lord is full of pity and mercy.
- (12-15) Above all my brethren, do not swear, neither by heaven, nor by earth, nor by any other oath. Let your yes be a yes and your no be a no, that you do not fall into judgement. Is any of you suffer misfortune? Let him pray, Is anyone cheerful? Let him give praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call together the elders of the church, and they will pray for him, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, And the prayer of the faithful will save the sick one, and the Lord will heal him. If he has committed any sin, they will be forgiven.
- (16-20) Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you might be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man has much power. Elijah was a man with the same nature as you, and he prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three and a half years. Then he prayed again, and the heavens gave rain and the earth produced her fruits. My brethren, if any among you err from the truth and some one convert him, know that the one who turns the sinner from the error of his way, saves his soul from death, and hides a multitude of sins.

Introduction

As we look at James five today we shall be hearing the final admonitions of James. We shall hear him as he warns the worldly rich of the coming judgement. We shall hear him admonish his hearers to ever more give evidence of their Christian life. He will also speak of the right use of the Word of God in prayer and praise and of the concern of the Christian for the souls of those around him. As we hear James speak, we will also know that he is speaking to us and exhorting us to ever more diligently pursue the Christian life. May the Holy Ghost be with us as we conclude our study of the book of James today so that our hearts will be open to receive this word of God and to apply it to our lives.

Warning Directed to the Ungodly Rich (1-6)

The first of James' admonitions is directed against the rich. This admonition comes in the form of a warning. It is not meant for all the rich but only for the ungodly rich. James gives fair warning to those who place their confidence in wealth and turn their back on God. These are those who have made their money and wealth their God. James tells them they should wail and lament the impending judgment. (Notice the onomatopoeic word James uses for weeping (*ὄλολύζοντες*), you can almost hear the wailing of the rich at the judgement.) In the judgment their wealth will do them no good, it will not be able to purchase admission into heaven. Riches will become corrupt and all the expensive garments moth-eaten. Wealth can serve a purpose but not as a god as such, it has no power and fades away. Jesus tells us that wealth is not something for man to place his confidence in because it becomes corrupt, Matthew 6:19-21, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The rich have the feeling that their wealth is good for all time. They feel that nothing can happen to it. But if it is not used in a God pleasing manner it is nothing and turns to rust. Recall the parable of the foolish rich man; where was his wealth when his life was required of him? It was gone. He could not take it with him. It would have been the same as if he had been a pauper, his money did nothing for him in death. The man who places his confidence in wealth is like the seed which falls among thorns, Matthew 13:22, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the Word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word and he becomes unfruitful." Or note the reaction of the rich young ruler when Jesus tells him to give up his wealth, (Luke 18:23, "And when he had heard this he was very sorrowful for he was very rich.") Such emphasis on wealth by the ungodly rich will give them great cause to wail and weep at the judgment.

"Your gold and your silver are corroded," James tells the rich "and the rust of them shall be a testimony against you." The rust indicates the value of the earthly wealth. The rust of the gold and silver will shout a loud accusation at its owner. You trusted in me and I can give you nothing. You trusted in me when you should have placed your confidence in God. Oh, how the rich heap up their wealth for the last days and what for? Soon they die and all their wealth is left behind. How much more wise it would have been to place their confidence in Christ. When the fires of hell are tormenting their flesh then they will realize how foolish they were on earth. Then they will see that their sense of value was completely distorted.

The rust of their wealth will be a testimony against the rich, and the cry of the poor enters the ears of the Lord. We now hear of the deceit of the rich. We see how they obtained their wealth. Their wealth was gained at the expense of the poor. The poor who have labored diligently were cheated. The harvesters have not received the pay they earned for the labor they performed. The laborers have been robbed. There are two readings concerning the manner of the theft; our text has *ἀφυστερημένος*, "having been dug out" and the alternate in the apparatus is *ἀπεστερημένος*, "having been robbed", both give essentially the same meaning to the text. There is sufficient evidence in the apparatus to let the text stand. The point is, the poor are being victimized. It is as the

saying goes. The rich got rich and the poor got poorer. The rich might get away with this robbery for a while but they still receive their reward. They can not continue to withhold wages from their harvesters and not be justly rewarded. If they do not receive their reward on earth it will come in the judgment, for the cries of the harvesters has come into the ears of the Lord of Hosts. It has come to the attention of the all-powerful Lord of all the stars of the heavens and all the angel armies. The Lord knows what is taking place.

The poor are exploited by the rich and as a result the rich are enabled to live lives of luxury. *σπαταλάω* has the meaning of the high life with the eye to wastefulness. The rich man in the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus is a good example of the type of living pictured in *σπαταλάω*. Such rich men fatten their hearts for the destruction they will receive as their just reward. “ἐν”, how is it to be translated? A.V. has “as in”, Lenski “in connection with”; translate it “as in” with the implied idea of preparing for the destruction of the judgment.

The picture is of the cattle fattened for the slaughter, in like manner the rich fatten themselves for the judgement. Part of their preparation for the slaughter is the condemnation and murder of the innocent. Who is James referring to when he speaks of τὸν δίκαιον? There are those who feel that it is a reference to Christ because He is referred to as τὸν δίκαιον in Acts 7:52, Acts 22:14 and 1 Peter 3:8. Certainly Jesus is τὸν δίκαιον, but here the reference from the context is the innocent who have exploited by the rich. The innocent do not resist because they have no weapon to use against such men, who can, because of their wealth, have everything their own way. This is the same innocent one who was robbed by not having received his full wage. What James speaks of in those verses takes place in our day in our so-called Christian communities.

Admonition to Patience (7-11)

After concluding his warning to the rich James turns to the Christians and exhorts them to be patient and endure what the world may inflict upon them, for the Lord’s coming is at hand. James can use such an exhortation since he was not asking anything he was not willing to do himself. According to historians James suffered martyrdom without complaint. Such patience and endurance is to characterize the Christian at all times, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

In order for his readers to better understand his exhortation, James uses the example of the farmer. The farmer has to be a patient man. He plants his seeds and has to wait for the earth to produce its fruits. Before he can receive the fruits of the earth it is necessary for the early and late rains to come. In patience the Palestine farmer knew his success depended upon the autumn rains after a hot summer and the spring rains in early April. This example of patience the Christians are to follow. They are to patiently await the Lord’s coming. In order to do this it is necessary for the Christians to prepare their hearts. James uses *στηρίζω*, “set up, fix firmly, strengthen.” A Christian can only strengthen his heart through Christ. Such a strengthening is needed since most assuredly there will be times when they will feel as though they are unable to wait any longer. They will be tempted to think that the Lord is not coming after all. But with help from above they find that time and time again they will be able to continue, for the strength their heart needs can only come from God. There is one thought that upholds them; that is the thought expressed by Paul, 2 Cor. 4:17-18, “For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are soon, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are soon are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Certainly this thought kept in the mind of the believers is able to help them endure whatever the world might cast their way and keep them strong until the coming of the Lord.

There is still time to wait for the Lord’s coming, during this time of waiting the Christians are not to give themselves over to the sin of complaining. The longer one waits the more impatient one becomes. This is also true of the Christian. Many give in to impatience and begin to grumble. When the grumbling begins it is generally in the form of comparing one’s lot with that of someone else. The grass is always greener. The complaints begin slowly and then they come fast and furious. Why must I always have to suffer? Why does everything happen to me? Look at Mr. So and So, he isn’t even a believer and it seems as though everything works out in his best interest. Such complaining would go on and on if not stopped, and would eventually be

turned against friends. One begrudges another's happiness. If I am in a terrible predicament then everyone else should be also. It is not fair that I should suffer while others are filled with joy. To such impatient thoughts James speaks, "Brethren do not complain about one another, lest you be judged," Such talk is completely out of harmony with the Word of God. Such actions are not to be recorded among the Christians waiting for the coming of Christ. What would happen if, when the Lord returned, he found the Christians complaining and grumbling about their circumstances. In reality such complaining is directed against God. It is saying that God is not taking care of His children. Beware, says James, for the judge is standing at the door. The judge is about to knock on the door. Do not be grumbling when he comes in.

James wrote nearly twenty-one hundred years ago and yet the Lord has not come. Are we then to disregard the words of James as the vain babblings of an overly pious man? God Forbid! What James spoke then is even more of a truth today. Each day that passes the world comes closer to the judgment. Each day that passes is another day of grace God has given the world. Let us in this day and age not misuse God's time of grace by complaining about our circumstances, rather let us prepare ourselves and the world as though the *παρουσία* of the Lord is to be today. We don't want the judge to come and find us filled with complaints about our circumstances.

"Look," James says, "at the prophets of old." They proclaimed the message God gave them and at the same time were mistreated. The prophets more than anyone had reason to complain. It appeared as though all their work was in vain. The people continued to turn from God. The people continued to treat the prophets with contempt, but the prophets endured. They suffered afflictions and they did so with patience. Jesus in the Book of Matthew uses the prophets as examples in His preaching, Matthew 5:12, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." The prophets are excellent examples of exactly what James means when he says, Be Patient. The prophets "may, therefore well serve as examples of patience and endurance which we should always keep before the eyes of our mind. If the Lord gave them strength to endure the manifold afflictions which came upon them to the end, He will be at our side with His comfort and with His power." (Kretzmann)

James closes his admonition to patience with reference to Job. What would an exhortation to patience be without mentioning Job? James says, "Remember those who endured without groaning or placing blame." The implication on is: 'Go and do thou likewise.' Look at Job!! Remember his many afflictions!!! He lost his family...he lost his friends... he lost his wealth...and finally he even lost his health, yet in the midst of all this he could say, "I know that My Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God," (Job 19:25-26). Job endured and his blessings were twice what he suffered. The Lord knew what He was doing and He showed that He was full of pity and mercy. "James admonishes to patience and brave perseverance and does not fail to add the strongest comfort. He does not stop to make application to his suffering readers and to tell them that the Lord has a goal set also for them, that his pity and compassion are extended also to them, and will at last bring them out of all their suffering and to the blessed goal." (Lenski)

Be Patient!! James speaks to us. He reminds us that if we have been afflicted we can be assured that it will turn out in our best interest, for it is as Paul says in Romans, "All things work together for good to them that love God," and Joseph in Gen. 50:20, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." God has the same loving concern for us as He had for Job, the prophets, Joseph, and James' readers. Remember that!!

Admonition to Use God's Name Rightly (12-15)

In verse twelve we are reminded of the second commandment where God forbids us to take His name in vain. James exhorts his readers not to swear any frivolous oaths. Why not? Because they are against the will of God and besides that they are completely unnecessary. Why should they feel it necessary to swear by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. It does not accomplish anything and it may even raise doubts in men's minds.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount condemns swearing, Matthew 5:34, “But I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by heaven for it is God’s throne.” A person who adds an oath to all that he says will eventually cause men to doubt the veracity of his word and discredit even those statements under a proper oath. It is like proving too much and in the end not proving anything. James is forbidding idle swearing which God forbids in no uncertain terms.

If one is not to call upon God with a useless oath, he is on the other hand to turn to God in prayer and praise. Such acts are using the name of God rightly. Rather than complaining when afflictions come the believer is to pray for deliverance. Prayer accomplishes more than complaints. If one is happy he is to express his happiness through praise. He is to praise God with psalms. He is to praise God, for it is from God that his joys come. How much better it is to use God’s name for prayer and praise than it is to take God’s name in vain with useless oaths. Use the name of God rightly, James says.

Another of James’ exhortations is that of calling in the elders when one is sick. Why call the elders? What can they do? What special talents do they have that they should be called. The elders are to be called that they might come and pray for the one who is sick and anoint him with oil. James uses *ἀλείπω* which means to rub oil on a person’s body for the purpose of healing him. This is the word used in Mark 6:13, “And they cast out many devils, and *anointed with oil* many that were sick, and healed them.” Rubbing one’s body with oil was a common practice at this time. The oil was to have certain healing qualities. This anointing was not done in preparation for death. It is not the Extreme Unction of Rome. It is to be noted that it was the prayer that had the power to heal, God hears the prayers of His faithful people and for their sake grants healing to the sick. It is the Lord who raises up the sick. It is the Lord who heals. The Lord hears the fervent prayer of faithful Christians and in His almighty wisdom He determines whether or not to answer in the affirmative. He and He alone can bring about the healing of one who is sick, and He has promised to hear and answer the prayers of the faithful in behalf of the sick.

Besides healing the sick of their illness the Lord is ready to go further, and for Christ’s sake forgive any sins that have been committed, God has promised to forgive sins. In this case also He listens to the prayers of the faithful and grants forgiveness of sins to the repentant. We are not to mistakenly think that this states that if prayers are brought before the throne of God on behalf of an unrepentant sinner that their sins will be forgiven. Such is not the case, the sins of the unrepentant will remain. What James says is that the prayers in behalf of the repentant will be heard and such a person’s sins will be forgiven for Christ’s sake. This is a special comfort for all sinners.

Admonitions to Confession and Intercession (16-20)

The forgiveness of sins spoken of in the last paragraph moves James to his final admonitions. Confess your sins to one another, James says. It will be noted this confession is to be to one another, it is an exhortation to confess but not to one particular person at the exclusion of others. This confession is to be made at all times and not just when a person feels extremely low. Confession will bring comfort to the sinner, for to unburden oneself to a brother is itself a relief and then to hear the absolution pronounced in God’s name affords the greatest relief. The sinner is in need of both. When one sinner unburdens himself to another and that one in turn prays for his brother, James gives the assurance that, “the effective prayer of a righteous man has much power.” God listens to the prayer of a righteous man. Such a righteous one has become righteous because of Christ. It would be folly to present one’s petitions to God in the name of his own righteousness, rather he is to present them trusting in the merits of Christ, thus “the effective prayer of a righteous man has much power.”

If any man would doubt the power of the prayer of a righteous man let him open his Bible to the pages of the OT, in particular to the book of 1 Kings. There he would find Elijah, a man not different from himself, having the same weaknesses and shortcomings. Look at Elijah, he preached the message of God and the people failed to listen to him. King Ahab wanted him dead. Elijah was a righteous man. He trusted in God. He believed what he preached. This man came before God with a prayer (1 Kings 17:1). It was his prayer that God would

stop the rains from falling on the earth. He prayed earnestly that God would send a draught on the land and God answered him and no rain watered the earth for three and a half years. After this time Elijah came once again before God in prayer (1 Kings 16: 42) and asked that God would once again permit the rains to water the earth. This prayer was also answered and the earth was watered and produced fruit.

James does not make the application, but it certainly should have been obvious to his readers. They knew what James was saying. He was telling them their prayers would be answered in similar manner. In fact, when praying for the forgiveness of sins God will always answer in the affirmative. Because we know God for Christ's sake will hear and answer our prayers we should be encouraged to fervent prayers, remembering that our prayers have great power.

James has spoken of man's works in this Book, but in the last two verses of the last chapter he mentions one of the most important of all works, namely turning an erring brother from his sin. The Greek used is ἐπιστρέφω, "to turn back" That is to turn from sin. It is the picture of a person walking in one direction and a 180° turn and going in the other direction. This is what the believer is to cause the erring brother to do. If a brother sins he is to be converted, turned back from sin. He is not to be allowed to remain in his sin. If a sinner is turned from his erring way he is saved from death. He is saved from an eternal death in the fires of hell.

What happens in conversion to save the soul from hell? His sins are hidden. This does not mean that God now overlooks sins, certainly that is not the case. God is a just God and therefore can not overlook sins. Sins have to be paid for. The sins are hidden in Christ. Christ has covered them with His righteousness. When God the Father looks at the converted sinner He no longer sees a person black with sins but a man clothed in the white robe of the righteousness purchased and won by Christ, through his suffering and death on the cross. "All sins that were committed by the erring brother will be covered over and forgotten for the sake of the salvation of Christ which was won for just such sinners. Surely this consideration should make all Christians not only to exert the utmost vigilance over their own conduct, but to watch also with the brother and sister that may be inclined to stumble and fall. Above all, such charity and patience should rule the Christian congregation as has its example in the love of the Savior." (Kretzmann)

Conclusion

With this study of James five we bring to a close our study of the book of James, a study which has opened to us a book which deals with the sanctified life of the Christian. It has been seen that faith in Christ is more than merely uttering certain pious phrases with one's lips, but manifests itself in the works produced by faith.

We are certainly all aware that the works that we perform accomplish nothing in respect to earning salvation. They are produced as the natural effect of the faith that is in use. If anyone does not produce good works than the love of God is not in him. In our Christian life let us remember what James tells and and pray for God's help so that we are able to lead the type of life He demands of us.