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JAMES 5:1-20

Today we finish our short study in the **Book of James**. Remember we said several weeks ago when we began our study that this letter was written to the Jewish believers who had been forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution.

And we've found in this book that James covered a wide variety of topics.

- He addressed how Christians are to behave when they encounter various trials.
- He told us how we can have wisdom from God if we would just ask.
- He taught us over and over to bridle our tongue...to be careful about what we say.
- He taught us that faith without works is dead faith.
- He taught us about quarrels and conflicts.
- He taught us about seeking the will of God in all that we do.

And that's only a partial list of the things God has taught you and me from the pen of James.

Today we're going to see James address another variety of subjects...from how **money can be misused...**

to how we are **to wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ**
to what **to do if we're sick**
to how **to restore a straying brother**.

And with the exception of waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus, the prevailing theme of this chapter seems to be trouble...

trouble in the form of **poor people** who have been deprived of their wages...and
trouble in the form of **folks who are sick**...and
trouble in the form of **folks who are spiritually backslidden**.

The **Book of Job** says, "Man who is born of woman, is short of days and full of trouble."

We're all going to have trouble in this life. We all have had trouble in this life. Some of us are in the midst of trouble right now.

But, thank God, we have an instruction book to see us through our trouble. We have a Savior who walks with us in the midst of our trouble. And we have the Holy Spirit who guides us through our trouble. And we also have loving friends who lift us up in prayer when we are in trouble.

And the principles we have seen so far in this precious book and we'll see in our lesson today are principles we can apply to our troubles right now in 2003.

So, with all that said, let's get to our lesson today...

James 5:1-6...

In this passage, James is speaking to wealthy people. And the commentators differ as to whether these people are saved or unsaved. I believe since the **Book of James** in general is addressed to saved people, there is no reason to believe that suddenly James began to address lost people.

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We see three things in this passage of James...we see **how the riches were acquired by these folks** and we also see **how the riches were used by these folks** and we also see what **results these riches brought to the lives of these folks**.

In **verses 4 and 6a**, James tells us the wealth of these folks had been acquired by withholding the pay of their laborers. The Bible doesn't condemn folks who are wealthy, but when that wealth has been acquired by cheating other people, that's stealing, isn't it? Money is not the root of evil...the love of money is! And the love of money indeed leads to all sorts of evil.

The rich young ruler turned down salvation because he loved his money more than he loved Jesus.

God had made it clear way back in the Old Testament that laborers were to be paid. Laborers back then couldn't count on a check on Friday or a check on the 15th and the 30th...laborers back then worked by the day and they were to be paid by the day, so that they could buy food to put on their table at night.

And it was a sin to withhold the pay from someone who had done work.

The next thing we see in this passage is **the way this wealth was used**. They stored it up! First, they stole it from their workers and then they stashed it away to rot and rust.

God wants us to use our money wisely. There's nothing wrong with having a savings account or other investments, but, **God doesn't want His children to hoard their riches!**

And the last thing this passage teaches us is what happens as the result of living like this.

While living like this may bring luxury for a little while, there will come a time when the wealth will be gone, or the wealthy person will be gone, or both.

There is no security in wealth. Our wealth can disappear so easily. The stock market can drop or crash. Investments can fail. Any number of things can happen. And it's a shame when folks get so accustomed to their wealth that all that they are is tied up in it.

We can't take it with us! But, we can send it on ahead. Jesus said, "lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven..." While you're down here you can be sending it up there.

How? How can you lay up treasure in heaven? Well, the only way you and I can do that is to invest it in something that's going to heaven. What's going to heaven? The souls of men! We can invest in the souls of men!

We can use our money to invest in the lives of people. The money we give to missions will continue to bear fruit down through the ages.

We can use our money to invest in our church for generations to come. Years and years after we're gone, the money we have given to build this church will bear fruit.

I pray that when we get to heaven, there will be at least one person who will say "I'm here because you gave..." Song??? "Thank you for giving to the Lord...I am a life that was changed..."???

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**“Though you carve your name high above the shifting sands
Where the steadfast rocks defy decay...
All you can hold in your cold, dead hands
Is what you’ve given away...”**

Verses 7-12...

James turns his attention now to the subject of patience. James used two different words for patience. In **verses 7, 8, and 10**, James used the word that means **“long-tempered.”**

And the words “endure” and “patience” in **verse 11** literally means “to remain under” and speaks of endurance under great stress.

Patience in this instance means **“to stay put and stand fast when you’d like to run away.”**

How can you and I have this kind of endurance and steadfastness and patience as we wait for the Lord to return? Well, to answer that question, James gave three examples that we could understand.

First, James talked about **the farmer**. And James said the farmer has patience after he plants seed. The farmer doesn’t run out to his garden the very next day to see if he has a harvest, does he?

The farmer has to **wait** for the harvest. He has to **wait** for the rains to come and water his crop. He has to **wait** for the seed to sprout and then to grow and for the produce to form and mature and finally, the farmer is ready to go and pick his peas or beans or corn or whatever it is...

And likewise, God is expecting a harvest from your life and my life. And the only way the Lord is going to get the harvest He wants is for you and me to be about His business...the business of scattering seed.

I mean, God doesn’t mean for you and me to get saved and then go sit on a mountain and watch for Jesus to come back. Just like the farmer works while he is waiting for the harvest...we too, must be busy while we are waiting for the Lord to come back.

Then James used another example...the example of **the prophets**.

Remember again to whom James is communicating. He wrote this letter to Jewish believers who have been forced to leave Jerusalem and other parts of Judah and Israel because of their faith. And they would have understood his example about the prophets.

They knew the prophets had suffered and been persecuted. They also knew they had suffered and been persecuted because of their faithfulness to do what God had told them to do.

We talked last week about how we should know the will of God and then do it. Well, we know from many examples in Scripture that being in the will of God doesn’t always mean we escape suffering. Obedience to the will of God will sometimes bring pain.

It brought **Elijah** pain. It brought **Jeremiah** pain. It brought **Ezekiel** pain. And it brought the greatest Prophet of all, the **Lord Jesus Christ**, pain.

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I believe the reason so many servants of God experience difficulty in their lives, is so that *their lives might back up their message*. The message of a suffering servant somehow makes a greater impact on you and me than the message of someone who has never ever had a problem.

How often have you been influenced and impacted by someone who is suffering, yet remains faithful to do what God has called him to do?

Gloria and I are reading through the Bible with The Navigators again this year and we've come through *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah* and we've just finished *Ezekiel* and are now in *Daniel*...and these books don't always make easy reading...

but what they do is make an impression anew and afresh upon us how faithful these men were to proclaim the message God wanted them to proclaim...no matter what!

The more we read and the better we know God's Word, the more we will be encouraged in the difficult circumstances of our own life!

Like the farmer, we must keep working, and like the prophets we must keep witnessing no matter how trying the circumstances of life.

James also gave us the example of **Job**. Now, Job is one example we don't ever want to follow, do we? I mean, Job lost everything he had except a nagging wife and three friends who knew all the answers.

But, Job remained faithful to God through all his trials and troubles. Job remained faithful to God even though God allowed Satan to come against him.

So, the question is this... "Will we and do we remain faithful to God in the midst of trouble?" Years ago Gloria made some cards in calligraphy that read, "*The will of God will never lead me where the grace of God cannot keep me.*"

In the midst of troubles and trials and tribulations, James said, "Be patient! Endure! And know that one day the Lord Jesus will come back and make all things right and we'll never go through another trial!"

Verse 12...

Doesn't this verse seem out of place? What in the world does taking an oath have to do with suffering?

Well, one commentator, John MacArthur, said that James mentioned this because the Jews of James's day had developed a complex system of swearing oaths, and the Jewish Christians had brought this system into the church and this system was being abused.

Another commentator, Matthew Henry, says this refers mainly to the act of swearing...as in profanity...

This may be what it means...but within the context of the passage, I tend to like what Warren Wiersbe says about it...and let me just share that with you.

If you have ever suffered, you know that in the midst of the suffering, it is easy to say things you don't mean. It's tempting to even make bargains with God in the midst of extreme difficulties.

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James used Job a few minutes ago...so let's think about Job again...

In the midst of his troubles, Job said,

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

Job actually did curse the day he was born...but Job never cursed God. Job never spoke with a foolish oath. Job never tried to bargain with God.

I'm not sure if this verse means what John MacArthur says it means or what Matthew Henry says what Warren Wiersbe says it means...**but I do know this. This verse does not forbid us from taking an oath in court nor does it forbid us from taking an oath at the marriage altar.**

Just recently we witnessed our deacons signing a covenant...that's the same as taking an oath.

The Bible tells of godly men who took oaths and the Bible even tells us of God's commands that oaths are appropriate for some occasions and even records instances of God Himself taking oaths. There were even occasions in the Old Testament when God **required** people to take oaths. **(Ex 22:10-11) The Bible teaches us about the Nazirite vow.**

The bottom line is that our word should be our bond. Our yes should be yes and our no should be no. If we are true Christians, with integrity, then all we have to say is yes or no and people will believe us.

Verses 13-18...

In this passage of Scripture we see James again emphasize prayer. And if you break it down, you'll see James address four different situations in which we should pray.

Verse 13...Prayer for the Suffering

Prayer can remove affliction and suffering...if it is God's will! But, more often than not, prayer accomplishes something else. God often answers our prayer by giving us grace to go through the affliction and suffering!

Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh? Remember that Paul asked the Lord three times that this thorn be removed? And what did God say to Paul?

He said, "Paul, I'm not going to remove that thorn. But, I will do this...I'll give you My grace, because My grace is sufficient for you. My power will be perfected in your weakness."

And it was!

Remember what the Lord Jesus said, "**If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.**" The cup **didn't** pass, but God gave His Son the strength He needed to go the Cross and die for our sins.

And I think the perfect picture of God's grace to us is the picture of someone who is suffering and he prays and then God brings him joy and he is able to sing in the midst of his affliction.

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I want to tell you that every time I see Elbert here at church and Betty Lenhardt here at church and Trudy DePriest and here at church...knowing the effort it took for them to be here, it is such a witness and example to me of how someone who is going through extreme difficulty and pain should respond.

The next thing we see is

Verse 14-16...Prayer for the Sick

And this has been the source of very diverse interpretations.

I don't believe this is a blanket formula for healing the sick. I've heard Bro. Bob say that he has been called to anoint folks with oil and prayed for them and some have been healed and others haven't.

First of all we need to see that it's the responsibility of the sick person to call for the elders of the church. It's not the responsibility of the elders of the church to call the sick person.

The oil here has been described several different ways.

Some say this oil is **medicine**.

Some say this oil is a "**rub-down**."

Some say that the oil symbolizes the **Holy Spirit**.

Some say this was a gift that ceased in the First Century church...

that there were some who had the gift of healing and that this **anointing oil accompanied their miraculous healings, but it's not for today**.

When you get down to it, the oil isn't really as important as the prayer! It isn't the **oil** that brings healing, it's the **prayer** offered in faith by this group of elders of the church!

Let me ask you...does this mean that every believer who ever called for the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and pray over them was healed? Yes! They are either healed here **on earth**, or they receive healing **in heaven**!

Every Christian who prays for healing from disease or injury doesn't receive it in this life. **Healing doesn't come to every Christian in this life**. If that were true, Christians would never die...they would always be healed! Sometimes it is God's will to heal and sometimes it is God's will not to heal.

The faith healer would tell us that if we're not healed it's because we don't have enough faith! No! In fact, it's not really the prayer of faith of the sick person that is mentioned here. It's the prayer of faith of the elders.

Remember the paralytic who was brought to Jesus for healing? The Lord Jesus didn't commend the faith of the man He healed. He commended the faith of his friends who brought him for healing!

Sin is not always responsible for our illness and suffering and affliction, but

I think this passage of Scripture makes it clear that **sometimes** it is our sin that makes us sick. James tells us to confess our sin to one another so that we may be healed.

And when sin **is** the reason we're sick, then confession is surely in order.

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No one likes to confess sin, do they? **To err is human, and to cover it up is too!** We don't want anybody to know we have any faults! James doesn't say to go around broadcasting our faults!

This is the rule to follow: **Private sin calls for private confession** between you and the Lord, and maybe with a faithful friend and prayer warrior who will pray for you. If you've sinned against me or I've sinned against you, we need to go to each other and confess and make things right between us.

But, if you have **publicly dishonored the Lord**, you need to **publicly make it right**...because even though you have gotten right with the Lord privately, your brothers and sisters in Christ may not know it.

"The effective prayer of a **righteous** man can accomplish much."

There is **positional righteousness**...we were **declared** righteous the day we were saved...**that's our position before God!** But, there is also **practical righteousness**. God wants us to live a holy life...**day by day seeking the will of God and living in that will.**

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The next thing we see is

Verses 17-18...Prayer for the Nation

James uses Elijah as an example of a "righteous man" whose prayers released power. Remember when we were in the **Book of 1 Kings** recently and we saw where Elijah prayed and God judged Israel and it didn't rain for three years? And then, Elijah prayed and it did rain.

Do you remember how many times Elijah sent his servant to look for the rain cloud? He sent him **seven times!** And Elijah was praying **ferverently** all that time!

James tells us we're no different from Elijah! But, I want to ask you...do you pray that fervently? Do you pray that consistently? Do you pray that faithfully? Would you have given up on the **third** try, or the **fourth** or the **fifth** or **sixth**?

I want to ask you something else... Do you pray for **your nation** like Elijah prayed for his? One of the first responsibilities of the Christian is to pray for government. And how our nation's leaders need prayer right now! How our president needs prayer right now!

Someone once said,

"When we depend upon **organization**, we get what organization can do, and that is something.

When we depend upon **education**, we get what education can do, and that is something.

When we depend upon **money**, we get what money can do, and that is something.

When we depend upon **singing and preaching**, we get what singing and preaching can do, and that is something.

But, when we depend upon **prayer**, we get what God can do! **And that is everything."**

What you and I need is what God can do!!!

What our church needs is what God can do!!!

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What our nation needs is what God can do!!!

Well, let's quickly look at

Verses 19-20...Prayer for the Straying...

James doesn't mention prayer in these verses...but surely if we are to pray for the suffering and the sick and our nation, then we are to pray for a brother or sister in Christ who wanders from the truth.

This person has fallen into sin because he has chosen to stray from the truth. Peter said, "**For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it...**"

One of the first things I remember Bro. Bob saying when he came to our church years ago is that when a Christian came to him and asked, "Bro. Bob, is alright for a Christian to go to a "R" rated movie, or to have a glass of wine or to go to a casino..." that what they were really asking was, "Bro. Bob, is alright for a Christian to wander?"

We're all "prone to wander" aren't we?

It is important that we seek to **win the lost**, but it is also important to **win the saved**. When the saved strays, God calls on you and me to bring them back. **Who else will?**

And while I believe this passage of Scripture applies to a straying believer, the application can be made to the lost sinner. After all, if a straying brother needs to be restored, how much more does a lost sinner need to be brought to salvation?

If the wandering believer loses his life, he at least goes to heaven, but the lost sinner who loses his life is condemned to an eternal hell!!

Well, we've just hit the highlights of this chapter and of **all the Book of James!**

The **Book of James** has been a manual for spiritual maturity of the believer. It's been a book showing us how we can actually accomplish living in the will of God. Throughout this book James has been practical! He has been realistic!

He hasn't gone into any high and mighty ways of saying things. His words have been carefully chosen. They have been direct, simple and plain. They have expressed his sure belief that God can help us.

If we walk in His way, if we play it straight, if we turn to God, if we seek to do His will, if we pray to God and we work with God, He will surely bless us!

The emphasis of this book has been the **spiritual maturity** of the believer. I sincerely hope you and I are more spiritually mature today than we were when we began this book several weeks ago.