

James 5A

- As we ended Chapter 4 last week, I read the final verse but I didn't take time to teach from it
 - James ended his fourth chapter by saying:

[James 4:17](#) Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

- James counseled that we shouldn't arrogantly declare our plans without consulting God first
 - If we aren't in the habit of asking God for His counsel before we make our plans, we're flying blind
 - We're forgetting that we have a very short time on Earth, and that time will come to an end as God determines
 - And when the plans of our life are made independently of God's will, we are acting in an arrogant and boastful way
 - Remember, the issue for James in this chapter was the problem with living in an independent prideful way
 - Seeking worldly gain, setting our priorities according to worldly values
 - And then quarreling with others when our worldly pursuits are frustrated by God
 - So James says we should acknowledge God's sovereign will and set our plans according to that will
 - Seeking to conform our lives to Him in humble obedience
- This leads us to v.17
 - Clearly, it's a sin to live our lives without consulting God's will
 - But in v.17 James now says it's also a sin when we consult God's will but fail to follow it
 - To the one who knows the right thing to do
 - The right thing is the thing that God is directing

- When we learn God's will as we see it revealed in His word or in our prayer life, but then we dismiss it in favor of our own desires, we sin
 - It's a sin of omission
 - We fail to do what God expects
 - Even if we do nothing, we're sinning because we didn't do the right thing
 - I think of the young rich ruler who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life
 - After some discussion, Jesus ends the discussion by testing the man's heart with a command to sell everything and follow Him
 - The ruler responds by doing nothing...he just walks away
 - For this man, to know the right thing but not do it was sin
- Now into Chapter 5, we see the second of two warnings
 - Last week we saw the first warning addressed to the believers in these Jewish churches
 - Both warnings begin with the phrase "come now..."
 - And both deal with the pride of life, the arrogance of living apart from God's will
 - In the first warning, the believer was at risk of offending God through a life of sin that either avoided God's will or ignored it
 - But now James' warning becomes even more serious

[James 5:1](#) Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

[James 5:2](#) Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.

[James 5:3](#) Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

[James 5:4](#) Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

[James 5:5](#) You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

[James 5:6](#) You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

- I said at the outset that this is warning spoken to the unbelieving Jew in these early Christian churches
 - Are you surprised that James would include a warning to unbelievers in a letter addressed to the Jewish churches in the Diaspora?
 - Why did James feel the need to address unbelievers? And why did he expect that they might hear this message?
 - Remember these letters were delivered to a city of people and were often copied many times as they circulated among the various destinations
 - That's why we call many of the New Testament letters "encyclical" letters
 - And along the way, they were read aloud in various forums and to collections of interested crowds
 - Many times these readings prompted the interest of local religious leaders, including Jewish leaders from the local synagogue
 - James anticipated that his letter might reach the ears of some of these unbelieving leaders, so he took the opportunity to speak to them here
 - So James writes to the churches knowing that he actually has two audiences listening
- James addresses these unbelieving leaders as "you rich"
 - Rich here means rich in every sense of the word
 - Financially wealthy, but also wealthy in power, knowledge and status
 - The Jewish leadership of that day were often a corrupt, self-serving elite group of men who used their position of power to take advantage of those under their charge

- And they were hostile to the Jews who had come to know Jesus as their Messiah
- James tells this group that their corrupt, evil behavior hasn't escaped God's notice
 - And James says these men should be howling and weeping because of the misery that is coming for them
 - James' perspective in all of Chapter 5 is on the day we meet the Lord
 - For these unbelievers, that day brings a terrible outcome
- He says they will find their riches rotted and garments moth-eaten
 - The precious metals they delight in will have rusted and be a witness against them
 - And that witness will condemn them, like a witness at a trial who points to the defendant and gives a damning testimony
- James says it will result in their flesh consumed by fire
 - And the stupidity of it all...they spent their life storing up treasure on an Earth that was in its last days
- Then James gives examples of how these corrupt leaders obtained their wealth
 - First, they cheated day laborers who worked for them
 - Mowing fields refers to men who harvest the stalks of grain
 - These men would typically work for one day at a time, and they expected to receive their wages for each day at the end of the day
 - They would use these daily wages to buy the food and other goods they needed to get through the next day
 - But at the end of the day, these men would use some technicality to deny them their wages
 - James says these men cried out against this injustice, and these cries have reached the Lord of Saboath

- The term Saboath means of the Host, emphasizing God's might as Commander of the Host of Heaven and therefore His power to bring justice and retribution against these injustices
 - These men will receive their penalty one day
 - This life of luxury has only served to fatten them for the slaughter
 - And then to top it off, they condemned and put to death the righteous man who did not resist their injustice
 - This is probably a double reference
 - It refers to the men they cheated in their pursuit of wealth
 - But it ultimately refers to the way the Jewish leadership treated Jesus Himself
 - And the two pictures unite in the way believers went to their death in the same manner as their Lord
- James' warning offered no hope for these men
 - He doesn't propose any solution or redemption for these leaders
 - That's in keeping with Jesus' own declaration against the generation of Israel who rejected the Messiah
 - Remember from our Luke study that Jesus declared that because Israel's leadership rejected Jesus and declared Him to be the Devil, they blasphemed the Holy Spirit
 - And if you remember, we learned that the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit was a unique sin possible only in Jesus' days on Earth
 - It was the unforgivable sin that resulted in that generation of Israel who rejected the Messiah being condemned by Christ

[Luke 11:29](#) As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.

[Luke 11:30](#) "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

[Luke 11:31](#) "The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

[Luke 11:32](#) “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

- Apart from a remnant whom God spared, Israel suffered the penalty of Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD and the judgment fires of God’s wrath at their death
 - And this condemnation came as a result of a corrupt leadership who preferred their riches and their power over the truth of the Gospel
- Today, we are still confronted by unbelieving men who assume leadership roles in society or even in the church and use those positions to take advantage of others
 - And when we see these injustices taking place, it’s only natural to react against these people
 - Either to speak in critical ways against them or even to rise up against them in some way
 - Sometimes we look for ways to take revenge, either for our own sake or for the sake of someone else who has been harmed
 - I’m not talking about self-defense but rather retribution
 - And when we find ourselves in these situations, we need to consider our response carefully
 - James says that those who were persecuted by these evil leaders did not resist, even to the point of their own death
 - And in that response, they earned praise in Scripture
 - Elsewhere, we hear Paul saying something similar:

[Rom. 12:17](#) Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

[Rom. 12:18](#) If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

[Rom. 12:19](#) Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

[Rom. 12:20](#) “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”

[Rom. 12:21](#) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[Rom. 13:1](#) Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

[Rom. 13:2](#) Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

- Paul affirms James' teaching
 - Our Christian testimony requires we work to remain at peace with all men so far as it depends on us
 - And that doesn't mean so long as they are treating us right
 - We are to leave revenge to God
 - And we can trust that He will bring about that revenge
 - But we need to understand that true revenge and justice isn't achieved in this world, but it will happen in eternity
 - And we actually interfere with God's plan of retribution when we try to take matters into our own hands
 - Even if God's plan for retribution doesn't kick in until after evil men have put us to death, it's still a better plan than the one we can enact on our own in the moment
 - We may win the fight in the moment, but what are we risking losing in the eternal because we resisted authority or didn't leave room for the wrath of God
 - Instead, we heap coals upon their heads by responding to their injustice with kindness
 - This is a Biblical principle...when we refuse to take matters into our hands, we acknowledge a firm faith and trust in God's sovereignty over our situation
 - And we leave room for the wrath of God, Who can do far more in revenging injustice than we could ever do on our own behalf
 - And our kindness in the face of injustice against us brings further condemnation to those who are intent on harming us
 - It's an act of faith to withhold retribution

- James addressed the sins of the rich and corrupt leaders who persecuted the faithful, but what should the faithful themselves do in response to these men?

[James 5:7](#) Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

[James 5:8](#) You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

[James 5:9](#) Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

- The Christian response to injustice is patience
 - The word for patience in Greek is *makrothumeo*, which means long tempered or delaying taking action
- And have an attitude that looks forward to the return of the Lord at the Rapture
 - Like a farmer that waits patiently for the harvest to come in, knowing that rains come both early and late in the year
 - In farming, the principle is not to get impatient and assume in July and August that the rain has stopped for good
 - Wait until the rain starts again late in the season, and then harvest when the time is right
 - Likewise, we don't want to rush the harvest
 - Don't think that justice won't happen, so we need to rush it along in our own power
 - Be patient
- James says believers respond to injustice by strengthening their hearts and reminding themselves that the coming of the Lord is not far off
 - Remember, the Bible's teaching that Christ is at the door is a teaching that recognizes that the Rapture is always imminent
 - There is no prerequisite to the Rapture...it could happen at any time
- And don't let our troubles and frustration lead to speaking negatively against others, especially against those in the faith

- When we speak badly of others, we judge them and that's not something we want to be doing when the True Judge arrives
 - And who is to say that God might choose to use our patience and long-suffering as an opportunity to bring someone to faith
 - We can be sure that God is far more likely to use our patience than to use our impatience should we strike back
- James offers an example for us to follow in living out this difficult command of patience

[James 5:10](#) As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

[James 5:11](#) We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

- Think about the suffering and patience exhibited by the prophets
 - The New Testament gives us a wonderful summary of what the prophets faced in Chapter 11 of Hebrews

[Heb. 11:32](#) And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets,

[Heb. 11:33](#) who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions,

[Heb. 11:34](#) quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

[Heb. 11:35](#) Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

[Heb. 11:36](#) and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

[Heb. 11:37](#) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

[Heb. 11:38](#) (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

- James says, use these men who suffered as our example
 - This is a far cry from the triumphalism that has come to dominate parts of the Church, particularly the American church
 - We are not destined to conquer and dominate our world

- We are not called to overcome the world with might and power and the Constitution
- The United States is not God's country, it's just another Gentile nation of lost and dying sinners
- I'm as much a patriot as the next guy
 - But as Christians, when we consider how we are to respond to injustice and persecution, the Bible calls us to remember not the Founding Fathers, but the prophets of Israel
- And we use them as our example, so that we never presume to encroach upon God's role as judge
- James then gives his own example using Job, who endured more sorrow and injustice than any of us will likely face in our own lives
 - And still he faced his situation with patience and endurance, and he refrained from condemning the Lord
 - In fact, he endured his circumstances while still praising the Lord
 - And James says we should take note of God's compassion and mercy which He showed Job in the end
 - Remembering how Job became an example to us of how righteous men should respond to injustice and suffering