

How Life Works

Pastor Carlos Sibley

November 17, 2019

Let's open our Bibles to the book of James. James chapter five. Congratulations to the Bulldogs. They made you sweat a little bit.

Some events in life happen that change things forever. It may be a personal event in your life where things are never the same. It may be a family event, it could be a cultural event or a national event. Certainly in all of our minds, when we refer to 9/11, we know that was an event in our nation's past that changed everything. We are still learning things that that one event on our land changed. Another example of that would be somewhere back there when the internet was created. Today we experienced change after change after change in every area of life simply because of an invention. Today when we come to the book of James, we continue to see this consistent teaching from James that faith in Jesus Christ changes everything. We receive the gift of eternal life when we trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That gift of eternal life is not put in a vault somewhere and held for us after we take our last breath here on this earth. The gift of eternal life is a gift that's current and present for every person that already knows Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Our bodies are experiencing decay, and like we've already seen in the book of James, we're like a vapor, a mist, that is here and is gone. But with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, living in us by his spirit, we currently have eternal life. We, when we take this last breath here on this earth, simply relocate, but we keep on living forever in the presence of Christ Jesus. Today, when we come to the book of James, I want you to continue to travel with me and see how James raises up areas of life that eternal life is to permeate. I think of it as like a yard where grass is growing. I noticed this weekend that there's a spot of Bermuda grass that, a couple of years ago it was confined to a particular area, and now I noticed that it has crossed the driveway and on the other side of the driveway there's just this creeping, crawling, permeating effect of Bermuda grass. It's changing what's on the other side of the driveway.

Eternal life comes to us and it is to grow and mature and take over every room of our life. We don't even know today how our faith in Jesus Christ will affect tomorrow, but it does. Every area of life. We're going to take a large passage of scripture here, relative to the book of James. We're getting ready to land this plane. We're getting ready to bring this book of James to a close next Sunday. Lord willing, we will finish our study in the book of James and then we'll come back after Thanksgiving and we will talk about the good news of Jesus Christ, celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, the need of people around us to know Jesus Christ, to have the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. We'll head toward December 15th, I hope you put that date on your calendar, December the 15th will be our first Sunday in our new worship space. I'm looking forward to that day and we're going to save our Christmas decorations and Christmas lights for December the 15th, and begin to enjoy the Christmas season in that building. I'm looking over here to see if Sean's squirming or sweating or twisted in his seat, but that's what I'm being told. That's what I'm hearing and that's what we're going to plan toward and we're looking forward to that day.

When you come to James chapter five I want to take it section by section, and I want you to see how eternal life affects everyday life in some particular areas that James addresses. The very first part of chapter five, I want to read a section and talk about it and then read a section, talk about it. In verses one through six, you have a warning from James, you have a warning of judgment on the rich. It's not the first time that James has gone to this subject of wealth and riches. He deals, more than a few times here in the book of James, with the poor, with the rich, with wealthy, and how we handle our riches and how we deal with those in need around us. Look at verse one.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.³ Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

Good morning. That's a good welcome, isn't it? Don't miss the tone. For James 5:1, one commentator described the language here as 'seething'.

You have laid up treasure in the last days.⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

James writes a warning of judgment on the rich. As you look at the book of James, we've said from the very beginning that this was a pastor, brother of Jesus. He did not believe Jesus was the Messiah until after Jesus had risen from the dead. James turns in faith to Jesus Christ and he doesn't celebrate being the brother of Christ, he celebrates Christ being his Lord, being his Messiah, being his Savior. You know from the book of Acts that James became the pastor in Jerusalem. The dispersion took place, a very specific point in time where the Jewish people were scattered and dispersed, and believers were scattered to other countries and other cultures because of persecution of their faith in Christ as Messiah. And James has written this letter to dispersed believers, dispersed Christians. The starting point and the context for passage after passage as we've looked at the book of James was to remember this passage is to believers. When you come to James chapter five verses one through six and you take these verses in, it's the one passage of scripture that is not addressed specifically and directly to believers. I don't think James was looking at these believers in Jerusalem and attacking them or rebuking them or preaching at them because of how they were handling their wealth. The key indicator of this is because this is the one section of scripture where James does not use that address, like more than a dozen times in the letter, of, "My brothers."

It's as if James is writing and he's thinking about the environment that they live in and he just explodes. He is wrapped up in anger. I get the picture of Jesus Christ himself going into the temple and overturning the tables. This is James's table turning moment in the temple. This is James addressing what riches can do in the heart of a person when they get ahold of them. This is a rebuke of how their culture around them was handling wealth. Don't miss the impact of

believers hearing the rebuke of the rich. I would liken that to a family that sits down and maybe parents are talking to their children about something that they're seeing in society. They make a statement or two about how those decisions being made in that person's life is going to lead to turmoil and trouble and heartache and disappointment. It's not a direct rebuke to the child that's sitting in front of them, but certainly it's meant for the child to take note of what they're seeing and what they're hearing and what the result of that lifestyle will be. James does this. It's a rebuke to the outsiders, but it's a reminder to the insiders. Today, I can't define by dollar figure who the rich are. This is not a decision about what qualifies a person as rich, but it is a passage of scripture that gives us an indicator about how we're to handle our riches when eternal life is the gift that we have.

There are three or four things here that James calls attention to wealth. He rebukes what he calls the rich in their society, and he warns them of judgment. He says, "Weep and howl." Those are powerful words, to weep over something, to howl over something, to screech over something. The scene there, what does this look like? He's calling them to say there's a misery coming on you because of the rule of wealth in your life that before it even gets here, it ought to have you wailing. I'm not sure it's as much a part of our 21st century 2019 culture as maybe it was a few years back, but there's probably some adults in this room that can remember knowing they've done something wrong and waiting on dad to get home. And when you hear dad come home, you go to the farthest corner of the house and you pray for a case of forgetfulness in dad's life and mind. Then, when you see each other, before the discipline is ever dispensed, the wailing has already started.

James is writing like that kind of shepherd. He's saying before the discipline's even dispensed, if you knew what was coming, there'd be wailing. And notice he describes, this is what this perspective of riches looks like. "Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days." He rebukes them for hoarding. He rebukes them for storing up this massive treasure. Of hiding it away, and he says, "Here's what happens when you hide it away and you just store up treasure here for yourself. It corrodes." It corrodes, it rots. It's moth eaten. Maybe you have had that experience of holding onto those suits for a number of years and finally you reached the point and you said, "Well, it's been 11 years since I've worn that suit, I'm going to just give it to charity." You pull that coat out of the closet and you began to look at it and you notice there's holes all down the sleeve. What's happened? Somewhere along the way, moths have gotten in and began to eat the fabric. James is showing that. He said, Look, the things that you're storing up for security, they rot, they're moth eaten, your gold and silver, they've corroded. "Corrosion will be evidence against you." When I read that, I wrote out in my margin this picture of corrosion. What do you think of when you think of corrosion? I always think of a battery. Of a corroded battery. I don't know if it's true or not, but I can remember over and over again, my dad saying, and my mom's saying, "Hey, Hey, Hey, don't handle that battery. It's corroded. It's got acid. It'll burn you." The picture here of this corrosion of stored up treasures is it begins to corrode. It begins to do something in you to create this reaction that will lead to your flesh being eaten.

So he rebukes them for hoarding, and then he says, "The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you." He rebukes for fraud. He

rebukes for the way they've handled their laborers, their employees. You've stored up, you've hoarded, and at the same time you have withheld wages that were due to those that have done the work for you. It's James rebuke for getting rich off of the poor wages of others. They're crying out against you. They're a witness against you. The harvesters there, their cries have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. He's saying, "God has heard the cries of those that have been abused by your use of your wealth." Then he says in verse five, "You've lived on the earth in luxury and self indulgence. He says, your pursuit has been for personal comfort. That word, "in luxury" means, "to break down." It has a picture of breaking something down to a point of comfort, of making it comfortable to where you're settled in it. Self-indulgence.

"You fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter." He gives a picture of a cow being gorged with food before it's taken to the slaughter. "You've condemned and murdered the righteous person." There is a cultural reference here that to withhold the wages of someone who deserves fair payment is was equivalent to taking their life. James shows the perspective of wealth in this way, is a perspective of wealth that leads to God's judgment. We read this passage and we need to look at it and take heed. We need to study our heart and see what we're doing with our riches. Do they have a hold of us? Are they managing us or are we managing them? When you read a passage like this, it is not a passage that rebukes working for a wage. It is not a passage that rebukes acquiring wealth. It is a passage that rebukes the abuse of wealth and the abuse of others with our wealth. And self-indulgence with our wealth.

The answer from this passage is not communism. The answer from this passage is not socialism. The answer for this passage is repentance and submission to God. That we would say to God, "Lord, here are the ways that you've blessed me, you've provided for me and I want to make sure Lord, that I put these possessions in your hands for your glory, for your use. You lead me, you guide me. You be Lord of even my possessions." It's a warning of judgment on the rich. Our eternal life affects every area of life, even our possessions. Today as I walk away from this passage and I say, "Lord, show me if what I save has the spirit of hoarding. Father, show me, reveal in me by your Holy Spirit if I have been unfair, if I have been fraudulent in any way, where I have a chance to speak into what others receive. Lord, show me, reveal your spirit, if I have put my comfort and my self indulgence over others around me. Lord, show me if I am just fattening myself instead of considering the needs of others. Lord, help me."

I want to tell you, it's a difficult passage. This is hard. I want to let James do the preaching here. I want to let the Holy spirit do the convicting here. So as we read this passage, let's not ignore it, but wrestle with it and let eternal life, let our faith in Jesus Christ, grow us and mature us and make us into this image of what God had in mind when he saved us. One of the ways that I believe we repent and we confess and we ask the spirit of God to show us where we're handling money wrong is to practice generosity. To find some way for those chains to be broken in our life, to regularly practicing generosity toward others as a reminder that it's not ours, it's God's first, and we're stewards of what he's put in our possession.

Now there's a second block of verses here that shows us where eternal life is to permeate, and that is he gives a call to patience for the suffering. Look in verse seven, it says,

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers,^[a] until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late

rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Verses one through six is a warning of judgment on the rich and in verses seven through 11 you have a call to patience for suffering, but he ties the two together. In verse seven he says, "Be patient, therefore, brothers." Don't miss that. It reflects back on what we've just said about wealth and riches. He turns from this conversation of rebuke and looking at society and how the perspective of wealth can bring judgment of God, and he says to the believers, "Be patient, therefore brothers." Be patient. Why does he call for patience? Because, just like you and I know, there is this great temptation that when we're going through suffering, when we're going through hardship, often our first thought is, "If I just had more money, it would be so much better, so much easier. If I just had more riches, if I just had more possessions, if I just had more, more, more then I wouldn't have to go through this. I could fix this." James is saying, "Look, be patient brothers, when wealth and money and riches are your security, here's what's happens. Here's where you're headed." That's the first six verses. So he calls them, he says, "Here's the right perspective, the right perspective in hardship and suffering is patience. Wait on God." And he shows the finish line. How long? It's like the Psalmist who says, "How long, oh Lord, how long?" James is living with this perspective that the finish line is the return of Jesus Christ. He's saying, "Be patient, therefore brothers, until the coming of the Lord." He mentions it again when he says, "The coming of the Lord is at hand", in verse eight, and he mentions it again in verse nine when he says, "The judge is standing at the door." There was a clear view of James that he believed not only that Jesus was the Messiah, not only had he risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, but Jesus is coming back, and that's the finish line. We're to be patient, we're to be faithful, we're to be steadfast until we see Jesus face to face. That's why we long for the coming of the Lord.

One of the reasons that we don't long for the coming of the Lord more is because we find ways to satisfy and give us a little bit of temporary relief in moments of hardship and suffering. And it takes our eyes off of looking to the Lord and depending on the Lord and it puts our hope and security in something that's temporary. Several years ago I noticed that in the hymn book that we were using at the church in Cleveland, we would have, what we called, old fashioned day. We would dress up in old clothes and bring out the oldest hymnals and dust them off and sing. Some of them had shape notes. You remember those? I remember one night, as we requested songs, we were just singing those songs over and over again, I noticed how many of those songs were about heaven. I was sitting there and at the bottom of the hymn pages, I began to read the words at the bottom of the hymn pages, song after song about heaven, looking at when they were written, and consistently over and over and over again, the

dates on those hymns about heaven you could see a tie to the days of the Great Depression. Times of great turmoil, and you could see that those hymns about heaven had been born out of times of great suffering. What they began to do is to look toward heaven because they were not finding their hope in this earth.

James is saying, "Be patient, therefore brothers, until the coming of the Lord." And then he begins to give some illustrations. He gives three, be patient like the farmer, be patient like the prophet and be patient like Job. Be patient like the farmer. Who has to wait in the midst of storm and pest and drought, for the crop to come in. What a beautiful clear picture it is. Some of you come from an agrarian culture, you still farm today, or maybe you have a small taste of it when you look at your garden. This was the world that I grew up in, and you were so dependent. Maybe it would rain today. Maybe it'll stop raining today. Maybe the snow won't come. Maybe the temperature won't drop below freezing and burn the blooms. He holds this up and he says, "You've got to be like the farmer who waits and waits through storm." He makes reference to the early rains and the late rains. In their culture, that would have been heavy rains that came in months equal to our May and equal to our October. October for us is historically the driest month of the year, but in their culture, October would've been a wet month. He's saying here that the farmer waits, he's got to have that rain in May. We've got to have that rain in October.

How do you wait? You establish your heart, you set your heart on the coming of the Lord. And as a reminder for us that as we experience hardship and suffering, when events happen in our life that is not what we had planned. This is what we're expecting for our kids. This isn't what we're expecting in my job. Whatever the situation might be. Here's the call, look to Christ, look to eternity. Hope in Jesus. He says, take the prophets who spoke the truth. They spoke in the name of the Lord. They suffered because of it. They had to be patient in the midst of it. They would preach the word and proclaim the word and people would not respond. There's no better example of that than the prophet Jeremiah who just weeps and thrown into prison and into pits, and he suffers and he just keeps proclaiming the truth. The record is that he stayed steadfast. He says, "We consider blessed those who remain steadfast." Then he raises up Job. Perhaps you heard people refer to the perseverance of Job, the story in the Old Testament. Of how he lost everything. Job declares, "Lord though you slay me, I will praise you." It's a call for us to be patient in hardship and suffering. He's worn the oppressors, who oppressed with their wealth and now he's reminding those of us, he's saying, "Look, don't look to that for your hope. Look to Christ's return as your hope."

What happens? What happens when we patiently endure? Here's what happens. We learn who God is. We learn who he is. We get to know him. Look at it, he says, "You have heard of the steadfastness of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord. How the Lord is compassionate and merciful." I don't know if you write in your Bible, but I took verse seven and I drew a line, I circled out in the margin from the word 'patient' and brought it all away around right under the word 'purpose' and just put an arrow there. That's what's going on. In our patience, we give time to us learning and knowing who God is and what God's up to. It's not immediate, it's not like you plant the seed one day and the next morning you're there reaping the harvest. It is like the farmer who plants the seed and you wait and you wait and there's surprise in their shock and there's comfort, there's ups and downs. But you're learning that in

the midst of that suffering who God is. He says, here's what you'll find. You'll find that the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Listen, it's one thing me to stand in front of you today and say we have a God that is compassionate and merciful. It's a whole other realm of experience for you to sit here and tell me, "Pastor, I found God to be compassionate and merciful." The only way that happens, it's not through preaching, it's through patience. It's through us waiting on the Lord.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 has captured my heart over the last couple of weeks and it says, "Let not the wise boast in their wisdom. Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich boast in his riches. But let him who boasts, boast in this, that he knows me and understands me. That I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness." Vic shared with me this morning a quote by Malcolm Muggeridge about suffering. I want you to hear this, it says, "As an old man, looking back on one's life, it's one of the things that strikes you most forcibly, that the only thing that's taught one anything is suffering. Not success, not happiness, not anything like that. The only thing that really teaches one of what life's about is suffering. Affliction. Supposing you eliminated suffering, what a dreadful place the world would be. I would almost rather eliminate happiness. The world would be the most ghastly place because everything that corrects the tendency of this unspeakable little creature man to feel over important and over pleased with himself would disappear. He's bad enough now, but he would be absolutely intolerable if he never suffered."

There's a warning of judgment. There's a call to patience. Maybe today as you're experiencing something that you would consider a hardship. Maybe your reaction to the enemy and your praise to God would be something like this. "I'm about to get to know who you are."

I'm about to get to know who you are.

Third, there is a prayer for healing for the sick and sinful. It's a call to prayer for healing for the sick and sinful. Verse 13 it says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." Both forms of prayer, praising, asking, seeking the Lord. "Is anyone among you suffering, let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let him pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." Now that's ESV. If you memorize scripture, maybe you learned that verse as, "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much." I like that version. I like saying the word availeth. It just has steel to it, it avails much. But the ESV here gives us what it means to avail. He's saying that the prayers of the righteous make things happen. There's power in a righteous person praying.

One of the great indicators that eternal life has taken hold of our heart and is walking into every room of our life is that we are more and more and more dependent on God to work in our life. And we're more and more dependent on prayer. We're more and more dependent on calling out to the Lord whether they're cheerful or hurting, whether it's praise to him or asking of him. This passage of scripture teaches us to pray for physical healing and teaches us to pray

for spiritual healing. I teaches us to pray for physical healing and spiritual healing. "Is any one of you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him." It has this sense that a person is so sick that they can't get to someplace where the elders are, where the pastors are, where the churches gathered. So if you're, you're sick, ask them to come to you. Request prayer, ask him to pray over you. He uses this picture of anointing him with oil, and there's a wide range of interpretations of what that means. Some think it might be medicinal, other think it may be some kind of sacrament, it's some kind of holy oil. It's my belief that it's representative of the work of the Spirit in a person's life, and that when you tangibly put oil on a person, you are reminding those being prayed for and you're reminding yourself that we are looking to the spirit of God to do the work. That we are looking at God's power for them to do the healing. He addresses sin in sickness. There's nothing here that would teach us that every sickness is a direct result of sin in a person's life, but it is a call for us to at least go there. To at least to say, "Lord, is there anything in my life you would convict me of that is sin that maybe has led to this sickness in my life?"

It comes up in the teaching of Communion and he says that some of you are sick because of the way you have observed the Lord's supper. There are indicators that there are times, but not every time, that sin is the cause of that sickness. Now in big picture, we know that all sickness and all death is a result of sin from the fall, but specifically in day to day life we at least need to go there and ask the spirit of God to show us is there anything wrong here that I need to confess? And then if it reveals, confess move on, pray, ask God's will to be done. I want to call your attention to this call to pray for one another. It's such a reminder as we bring this to a close, of the power that we have from being in fellowship and relationship with one another. If there is a need for physical healing or if there's a need for spiritual healing, that we would bring others alongside us to pray and win.

Tonight we're going to pray. It's our Round Four of prayer and I want to encourage you to be here this evening. From 5:30 to 6:30, we're going to pray together. We're going to pray for one another. We're going to seek the Lord in prayer together as a body of believers. I ask you today, what room in your life does eternal life need to take over? Is it in the area of riches? Is it an area of patience? Is it in the area of prayer?

Father, we bow before you and we ask you today, Father, that you would convict. You'd show us where we're wrong. That you would change us. I pray, Lord, that we would grow spiritually, that eternal life would take over some new territory today. Lord, would you show us the rooms of our life that we've maybe closed off to you, or not open to you. I pray those doors would come open and spirit of God, would you had rule and reign in us. Our lives would be in step with you. I pray you would make us generous, patient, prayerful people. In your name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.