

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Epistle of James

(SB_James_Lsn4)

Outline of James

SALUTATION (1:1)

PROLOGUE – RESPOND PROPERLY TO TRIALS (1:2-18)

- Embrace trials (1:2-11)
- Do not blame God (1:12-18)

THEME – BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO WRATH (1:19-20)

BODY OF THE LETTER: CULTIVATING THE BEHAVIOR (1:21-5:6)

- Be Swift to Hear (1:21-2:26)
 - Involves more than listening; involves good works (1:21-27)
 - Demonstrated by impartiality in treatment of others (2:1-13)
 - Demonstrated by the combination of faith and good works (2:14-26)
- Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
 - Control the tongue (3:1-12)
 - Conduct demonstrates wisdom (3:13-18)
- Be Slow to Wrath (4:1-5:6)
 - Wrath is created by worldliness (4:1-5)
 - Wrath is cured by humility (4:6-5:6)
 - Humility is demonstrated by repentance from sin (4:6-10)
 - Humility is demonstrated by restraint in speech (4:11-12)
 - Humility is demonstrated by reluctance to boast (4:13-5:6)

EPILOGUE: PERSEVERE IN TRIALS (5:7-20)

- Perseverance will be properly rewarded (5:7-11)
- Perseverance is empowered through prayer (5:12-20)

**The sections highlighted in yellow are the sections covered in previous lessons. The sections highlighted in blue are the sections to be addressed in this lesson.

Dealing with Wrath – Be Slow to Wrath (4:1-5:6)

James has already addressed two of the three components of his three-part theme, i.e. “be swift to hear” and “slow to speak.” In chapter 4 and the first few verses of chapter 5, James deals with the third element of wise behavior – be slow to wrath.

Wrath is Created By Worldliness (4:1-5)

4:1 WHAT is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is

hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?¹ (James 4:1-5)

Evidently, the Jerusalem church was plagued with quarreling and strife among its members. James has already addressed one of the symptomatic results of worldliness in chapter 2, verses 1-9 – preferential treatment of the rich man who enters the assembly. He continues the thread of thought that was first introduced in 3:14-16 when he notes that the “*wisdom*” of the world is rooted in bitterness, jealousy and selfish ambition. This worldly “wisdom” ultimately leads to contention, strife, disunity and division.

In 4:1-5, James resumes the thread as he explores the effects of the worldly attitude in greater depth. A worldly orientation only leads to selfishness, self-centeredness, inordinate ambition (often times driven by a personal quest for validation), and a tendency toward wrath as the believer comes under increasing pressure to keep it all together as the lust cycle snowballs driven by a desire to consume more in its downward spiraling spiritual path.

- *The Cause of Worldliness (4:1-2)*

He asks the rhetorical question – ‘is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members,’ the implicit answer to which is “yes.” The Greek word for “pleasures” is *hedone* from which we derive our English word *hedonism* – the philosophy that views pleasure as the chief goal in life. In other words, James is answering the question – “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?” He states that it is his readers’ desire for pleasure. This is tantamount to worldliness.

In verse 2, James makes a very interesting statement. He states that his readers were committing murder. Were the believers in the Jerusalem church really killing other people? Is that James’ point? His audience did in fact consist of believers (2:1). But, James is probably using the word “murder” as hyperbole for hatred. There was a tendency in the 1st Century A.D. to equate hatred with murder.

21 “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ **22** “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matt 5:21-22)

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 Jn 3:15)

The attitude of independence by the arrogant, worldly, self-sufficient believer is demonstrated by the missing content in their prayers. They did not have because they did not ask. To ask the heavenly Father for one’s logistical provision is not only appropriate, but it demonstrates a mindset that recognizes the source of all provision for life.

- *The Consequences of Worldliness (4:3-5)*

When James’ readers did ask, they asked with improper motives – to satisfy their own lust for pleasure. They wanted worldly riches and wealth in order to try to satisfy their desire for pleasure. They had no interest at all in using their wealth and material blessings to aide the weak

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

(see Jas 1:27; 2:4-6, 14-17). They were more interested in their own prominence, status and position in society due to their inordinate lust for approbation. They wanted to be teachers without having met the qualifications (see Jas 3:1).

James rebukes his readers for their unfaithfulness to the Lord Who had made all spiritual provision for them and Who was also faithful to provide for all of their logistical needs. The people of God within the Age of Israel were compared to a wife of the Lord (Jer 31:32). In Pauline, church age literature, the Body of Christ was also compared to a wife (Eph 5:23-32).² Therefore, when James uses the term “adulteresses,” he is referring to spiritual unfaithfulness – a theme that is recurrent in Hebrew Scripture (see Hosea 2:2-5; 3:1-5; 9:1).

If the believer is a friend of the world, then the believer is aligned with God’s enemy and has joined forces in the spiritual battle with God’s enemy. Not only is such a believer a spiritual adulteress, but that believer is equivalent to a traitor.

To have a warm, familiar attitude toward this evil world is to be on good terms with God's enemy. It is to adopt the world's set of values and want what the world wants instead of choosing according to divine standards. The person who deliberately "chooses [*boulethe*] to be a friend of the world" by that choice "becomes an enemy of God."³

Some translations of verse 5 have left modern-day readers with the impression that God has placed a spirit of jealousy within the believer – “the spirit He caused to live in us tends toward envy” (NIV). However, that is not the best rendering of the Greek for this verse. The better rendering would be something akin to “the Spirit [Holy Spirit] who has been caused to make His permanent home in us has a passionate desire ...to the point of envy.”⁴ This translation is more consistent with the argument that James is making in these verses, i.e. if the believer is a friend of the world, God jealously longs for their love and adoration as their legitimate spiritual spouse.

Wrath is Cured by Humility (4:6-5:6)

6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He

² It is interesting that we see references made in Revelation 19:7-8 to the “bride” of the Lamb being made ready for the marriage supper. Then in Revelation 21:2 & 9, we see the “bride” as the “wife” of the Lamb and specifically identified with the New Jerusalem. The twelve gates of the city have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written upon them (21:12). The twelve foundation stones of the city have written upon them the names of the twelve apostles (21:14). Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are allowed entrance into this city (21:27) and the “nations” will walk by its light and the “kings of the earth” shall bring their glory into it” (21:24). Believers (no specific dispensation mentioned) are said to reside in this city and “reign forever and ever” with Him there (Rev 22:3-5). It is very possible that the New Jerusalem is equivalent to heaven, the abode of resurrected saints of all time (church age and other) and the location from which Christ and His resurrected saints of all time rule and reign over the earth during the Messianic kingdom. We will develop this further in our Prophecy series.

³ Frank E. Gaebel, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1989-1998), electronic version.

⁴ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament, An Expanded Translation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), 545.

will exalt you. **11** Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. **12** There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? **13** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." **14** Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. **15** Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." **16** But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. **17** Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

5:1 COME now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. **2** Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. **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! **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. **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. **6** You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you. (*Jas 4:6-5:6*)

- *Humility is Demonstrated by Repentance from Sin (4:6-10)*

James continues his argument in 4:6 with a statement that is very interesting – “He gives a greater grace.” This phrase indicates that God dispenses differing levels or degrees of grace toward the believer. The condition for the receipt of this grace by the believer is dependent upon whether the believer possesses humility or not. God withholds His grace from the arrogant believer who is attempting to live a life in league with Satan’s system (i.e. the world). Such a believer demonstrates an attitude of independence from God rather than dependence upon a loving Father’s provision. The attitude and desire for independence from God was at the root of the moral fall of Satan in eternity past and was at the root of Satan’s enticement of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The more dependent we are upon the Lord as expressed through our prayers and actions (Jas 4:2-3 cf. 2:14), then the more God’s infinite grace is dispensed to us.

We should understand James’ reference to the devil in verse 7 based upon the context. James has been arguing that the believer who aligns him or herself with the world has effectively aligned with God’s enemy – Satan or the devil. When believer’s resist the lure of the world’s system of empowerment and humbly “submit” to God’s plan of empowerment, then the allure of the world does in fact begin to fade or flee.

James issues a series of ten commands in vv. 7-10 ("submit," "resist" [v. 7]; "come near," "wash," "purify" [v. 8]; "grieve," "mourn," "wail," "change" [v. 9]; "humble" [v. 10]). In each instance the Greek aorist imperative calls for immediate response. It is a pointed and forceful way to demand action. Rather than resisting God's will for us, we should "resist the devil." James seems to suggest that the spiritual unfaithfulness of v. 4 was the result of the devil's influence. The promise "he will flee from you" gives assurance that, as powerful as he may be, Satan can be resisted.⁵

⁵ Gaebelien, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version.

The audience of believers to whom James' letter was directed had involved themselves in sinful actions as well as rebellious thought patterns. James' command to them to "cleanse their hands" (4:8) is a command to make their conduct pure. James' command to "purify your hearts" is a command to purify their thoughts and motives. They were "double-minded" because they were desirous of serving God, yet at the same time, they were adhering to worldly attitudes.

The believer should only be "miserable" and "mourn" and "weep" (4:9) when there is a realization on his or her part of the gulf that exists between their current thinking and conduct and that which God desires. These are simply manifestations of true repentance and should be interpreted in context. These are not to be seen as the constant characteristics of the believer for such would be contradictory with the rest of Scripture.

The fact that God exalts the humble is a consistent theme throughout Scripture and James draws upon that theme in 4:10.

12 "And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (Matt 23:12)

11 "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Lu 14:11)

14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Lu 18:14)

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5-11)

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time. (1 Pet 5:6)

- *Humility is Demonstrated by Restraint in Speech (4:11-12)*

Being slow to wrath is demonstrated in one's speech – one should also be slow to speak. When James refers to the "law" here, he could be referring to the Mosaic Law, e.g. Leviticus 19:18 – "Love your neighbor as yourself." However, James has already referred to the "law" on several previous occasions and he has even named the "law" to which he referred – the "royal law" (2:8) and the "law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12).

As we've seen previously in our study of these passages, the "law of liberty" or "law of freedom" is a phrase that seems to encapsulate the new freedom in Christ that believers had to live as led of the Holy Spirit versus a rule-bound devotion tradition and legalism.

James's use of the term 'law' deserves special attention. He calls it 'the perfect law of freedom' (Gr.). The use of the word 'law' reveals his Jewish orientation and that of his readers. But James qualifies the word to make sure his readers do not misunderstand. He describes this law as 'perfect' and as characterized by

'freedom.' It is not merely the OT law, nor is it the Mosaic law perverted to become a legalistic system for earning salvation by good works. When James calls it the 'perfect law,' he has in mind the sum total of God's revealed truth--not merely the preliminary portion found in the OT, but also the final revelation made through Christ and his apostles that was soon to be inscripturated in the NT. Thus it is complete, in contrast to that which is preliminary and preparatory. Furthermore, it is the 'law of liberty' (Gr.), by which James means that it does not enslave. It is not enforced by external compulsion. Instead, it is freely accepted and fulfilled with glad devotion under the enablement of the Spirit of God (Gal 5:22-23). For similar uses of the term 'law' in James, see 2:8, 12.⁶

- *Humility is Demonstrated by a Reluctance to Boast (4:13-5:6)*

In the remaining verses of chapter 4 (i.e. 4:13-17), James uses a very practical example of how these believers were demonstrating their attitudes of self-sufficiency and arrogant independence. It was very common for Jews to travel extensively during the 1st Century A.D. in the conduct of business. We've seen illustrations of this in our study of the book of Acts, e.g. Aquilla and Priscilla and Lydia – the seller of purple. For the believer to make business plans without any consideration of the will of the Lord in the matter and with such a presumptuous attitude is the height of arrogance. We should not precede every action with phrase "if the Lord wills" lest we quickly adopt a pious demeanor and cheapen the meaning of the phrase; however, James is indicating that it should nevertheless be our attitude for we do not know what tomorrow holds.

I believe that James is using a straw man group of unbelievers in chapter 5:1-6 as an example. These people are not addressed as "brothers" as is prevalent throughout the rest of the letter. Furthermore, they are not called upon to repent and change their ways – only to weep and wail for the judgment they will undergo. This passage follows the pattern used of OT prophets whereby judgment was pronounced upon the unbelieving nations in association with the warnings being issued to God's people. We've already established the fact that there were probably believers and unbelieving Jews in the synagogue in Jerusalem and James has alluded to both groups previously.

These unbelievers were hoarding various forms of wealth – money, commodities (grain, food, oil), and clothing. They had hoarded so much that some of it was rotting. It was uncontrolled greed that was in effect robbing the poor – probably the believer Jews. Another example of how they effectively robbed the poor was by withholding or deferring wages.

James makes an interesting statement in verse 3 – "It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure." James clearly had a judgment in mind – the same judgment referred to in Revelation 20:11-15. In that passage, you may recall that unbelievers will be judged according to the things written in the "books" – "books" which contain the deeds of men. James and John were both leaders in the Jerusalem church and even though John did not write the book of Revelation until A.D. 95 or 96, the fact of a judgment of unbelievers and a resurrection of the dead was much older and a significant part of Hebrew theology. John's vision provided more detail; however, the thread of thought was present even prior to James' writing of his letter.

Finally, these unbelieving Jews had even murdered innocent men. Examples include Jesus, Stephen, James the son of Zebedee, and eventually the author himself. These innocent or righteous men most generally came from the ranks of the poor.

James returns to addressing believers in verse 7 and that is where we will resume in our next study.

⁶ Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version.