

JAMES

Chapter 5

Warning to the Rich

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. 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.

5:1-6 As in 4:13-17 and 2:2-7, this section warns against self-reliance that does not submit to God's will but turns God toward "friendship with the world" (4:4). (TLSB)

James continues the discussion, introducing it as in the previous section (4:13). with *hage* ("Come now," RSV). The godless ways of the oppressive rich will be used as the basis for God's judgments on the Last Day. If addressed to the rich persons in the Christian community (1:10), then the judgments expressed are warnings of how close they were to rejecting the faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

These unbelieving rich had no concern for day laborers who lived from hand to mouth. The Mosaic Torah emphasized that the wages of a hired servant must be paid him at the end of each day's work (Lev 19:13). If they were not, then the poor man and his family would go without food—a forbidden injustice (Deut 24:14–15). The worker is worth his keep (Matt 10:10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

These rich people were basically materialists. Their focus was on their garments, houses, money, luxuries, and pleasures. But James says that they will perish, together with all their possessions. With prophetic vision he declares that their wealth has rotted and their clothes are moth-eaten. Gold does not corrode or rust naturally, but the language is supernatural and has its roots in the apocalyptic visions of the prophets about the end times (Is 2:2; Mic 4:1; Hos 3:5; Joel 3:1; Amos 8:11; Zech 8:23) and the attendant judgments upon the godless. The reference to their flesh being eaten by fire echoes Is 66:16; 24. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

James' teaching reflects the awareness of the early Christians of the "day of slaughter," a phrase borrowed from Jer 12:3, where the prophet speaks about the wicked who will be dragged off like sheep to be butchered (see also Heb 1:2; 1 Pet 1:5; John 2:18). God has heard the cries of the oppressed; the innocent victims will be avenged. James even transliterates the Hebrew *tsəva'oth* "[Yahweh] of hosts," revealing how close his thought is to that of the Old Testament. (The NIV translates "Yahweh/Lord of hosts" as "Lord Almighty"). James' accusation that they unjustly condemned the righteous parallels the accusation in Amos 2:6–7; 5:10, 12. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Paul likewise warned that one's body must not be controlled by the desire for food or sex. Our bodies, he taught, were purchased with the blood of Christ. Those in whom Christ's Spirit dwells

are his temple. Therefore they must honor God with their bodies (1 Cor 6:12–20). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

For a fifth time in his letter, James deals with the rich. He warns the rich who are outside of the assembly to “weep and howl” (v 1), for misery is coming to those who are not rich toward God. They have hoarded their riches instead of using them for their intended use, to benefit the poor. The rich have mistreated their employees and the Righteous Person (Christ). The rich misused their gifts but were also involved in the oppression and the death of Christ. They continued to attack Christ (Acts 9:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

5:1 rich. These (as also in 2:2, 6) are not Christians, for James warns them to repent and weep because of the coming misery. Verses 1–6 are similar to OT declarations of judgment against pagan nations, interspersed in books otherwise addressed to God’s people (Isa 13–23; Jer 46–51; Eze 25–32; Am 1:3–2:16; Zep 2:4–15). (CSB)

To the remarks which the author has written concerning the rich in the first part of his letter he now adds an exhortation in which he calls upon them directly to consider their ways: Come now, you rich men, weep with lamentation over your calamities which are impending. (Kretzmann)

weep and howl – Frequently this is used to describe the suffering of God’s people because of His judgment on their unfaithfulness (Jl. 1:5; Mal 2:13). (TLSB)

5:2 garments. One of the main forms of wealth in the ancient world (see Ac 20:33). (CSB)

He wants the rich people to take notice, to stop for a moment in their mad scramble for wealth. For even a superficial consideration of their actual position will take all self-satisfaction and pretended happiness out of their heart and mouth, and cause them, instead, to weep bitterly, unto howling, over the miseries and calamities which are drawing near them. It is a prophetic warning of great energy. Cf. Luke 6:24. (Kretzmann)

5:3 corrosion. The result of hoarding. It will both testify against and judge the selfish rich. (CSB)

last days. See notes on Ac 2:17; 1Ti 4:1; 2Ti 3:1; Heb 1:2; 1Jn 2:18. (CSB)

5:4 your fields. James addresses landowners who were unjust to their workers (cf 4:13). (TLSB)

Lord of hosts. Title used for Yahweh, in particular when He comes in power to judge (Is 5:9; Zec 13:2) (TLSB)

5:5 luxury and self-indulgence. See Lk 16:19–31. (CSB)

the day of slaughter. The day of judgment. The wicked rich are like cattle that continue to fatten themselves on the very day they are to be slaughtered, totally unaware of coming destruction. (CSB)

James compares the wealthy to fattened cows that are slaughtered for a feast; they have fattened themselves, but they will be destroyed. (TLSB)

5:6 murdered. Selfish desires lead to murder. (TLSB)

righteous person. Not a reference to Jesus; cf 1Ki 21, Naboth, instead. (TLSB)

He does not resist you. Or, “Does not He (God) oppose you?” This translation fits with 4:6, where the same verb is used (“God opposes the proud”). (TLSB)

5:1–6 James condemns the wealthy for living as if this life is all there is to live for and as if Christ will not return. God’s Word repeatedly warns against this attitude. It is easy to think that such words do not apply to us because there is always someone wealthier, someone greedier. But Scripture teaches, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich” (2Co 8:9). In Christ, we have the riches that come from God alone—above all, the gift of faith. He will give us the crown of life. • “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen” (Rm 11:33, 36). (TLSB)

Patience in Suffering

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, 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.

5:7-8 Patience is urged. Jesus is still accomplishing his task. Wait for the crop like the farmer. What should the “brothers” (pastors) do? Preach the Word, administer the Sacraments. Patience is required—one might say that the farmer is Jesus, and he is assisted by his co-workers—so Paul urged Timothy to instruct patiently (2 Tim 4:2). Since the coming of the Lord is at hand, be patient. Patience equals persistence in spite of an unfavorable environment. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

5:7 be patient therefore brothers – Based on trust in God’s promises. (TLSB)

James is addressing the pastors of congregations and how they are to lead their people. The reason for patience is that Jesus is still applying the benefits of His atonement on earth through the preaching of the Gospel and premature return would disrupt this work. Patience in the NT is not only a virtue required by Christians, as James indicates here, but it is also a virtue of God, who hesitates to express his anger in judgment to allow time for unbelievers to repent. (Scaer)

In the same way, Christians will not always see proof of God’s power, authority, and plans. In the short term, we will often see what looks like proof of the opposite – that Satan owns and controls this planet, that we are on our own, that there is no deliverance from suffering. (PBC)

2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

brothers – Following a stern rebuke of the wealthy (4:13-5:6), James now speaks words of comfort, addressing his readers with a more personal term (cf. vv.9,10). (TLSB)

coming of the Lord – This is about the visible return of Jesus on the Last Day (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39) – All of us need judgment day therapy to keep our thinking straight, that is, regular reminders that Christ the King will return soon, without warning, as judge and Redeemer. (PBC)

Jesus' return in glory (2Th 2:1). (TLSB)

For it is only for a short while that they are obliged to suffer. One fact always is held before their eyes, namely, that their Lord is coming, that He will surely return in glory. Yet a little while, and He that is coming will come, and will not tarry, Heb. 10:37. (Kretzmann)

farmer waits – Confident that the harvest will come, a farmer patiently waits for the crop to ripen. Similarly, confidence in Christ's return leads to patience. (TLSB)

precious fruit – timon – This term is associated with the atonement. (Scaer)

early and the late rains. In Israel the autumn rain comes in October and November soon after the grain is sown, and the spring rain comes in March and April just prior to harvest (Dt 11:14; Jer 5:24; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:24). (CSB)

This refers to the rains which come in Palestine just before the sowing, causing the seed to germinate, and before the final harvest, causing the plants to produce the most abundant crops possible. The early rain comes in the late fall, and the late rains in early spring. In referring to the rains James is speaking no more of agriculture than Paul is with his reference to watering what has been planted. James with the agricultural imagery used in Jesus' parables is referring to God's providing the Gospel for the church. (Scaer)

5:8 *establish your hearts* – This is a plea for Christians not to desert the faith. Standing firm in Christianity, especially in the midst of the temptations associated with persecution, becomes more tolerable when Christians realize that the delay in God's coming in judgment, is for the purpose of a greater salvation. (Scaer)

The Scriptures are full of encouragement to see our pain and troubles as temporary and bearable in the light of God's eternal promises. The seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 all sound the theme of that grand book: overcome. Satan tries hard to use our sorrows as proof that he has won. But the blood-stained cross and empty tomb of Christ shout even more loudly that sin, death, hell, and Satan have lost their power to hurt us forever. Hang on! (PBC)

This example the Christians should follow. Have patience also you; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Patient endurance should be the keynote in the lives of the Christians. Times innumerable their hearts are on the verge of growing faint and of giving up the apparently unequal struggle. But with help from above they find themselves able again and again to strengthen and confirm their hearts. For that thought upholds them, that the coming of the Lord to Judgment is near, that His return means everlasting bliss for them. There is only a short time of waiting, and then the harvest will be gathered with joy ineffable. (Scaer)

The ESV has "Establish your hearts" or it can mean "strengthen your hearts"; confidence that comes from trust in the Lord (Ps.10:17). (TLSB)

5:9 *Do not grumble*. James calls for patience toward believers as well as unbelievers (vv. 7–8). (CSB)

Not only should they avoid speaking against one another, but their less than fully articulated grumblings against each other are unacceptable. The groaning and moaning really consisted of statements of judgment against one another. They were putting themselves in the place of God, the Judge, to whom alone the right of passing judgment belongs. – We need each other! We need encouragement and guidance from our fellow Christians, not verbal abuse and gossip and judgmental criticism. (PBC)

The Judge is standing at the door! A reference to Christ's second coming (see vv. 7–8) and the judgment associated with it. The NT insistence on imminence (e.g., in Ro 13:12; Heb 10:25; 1Pe 4:7; Rev 22:20) arises from the teaching that the “last days” began with the incarnation. We have been living in the “last days” (v. 3) ever since (see note on Heb 1:1). The next great event in redemptive history is Christ's second coming. The NT does not say when it will take place, but its certainty is never questioned and believers are consistently admonished to watch for it. It was in this light that James expected the imminent return of Christ. – This means that he is now ready to enter into the world to exercise judgment. (CSB)

Jesus' return is at hand and can occur at any time (Mk 13:32–37). The Lord may judge here and now, but certainly also on the Last Day. (TLSB)

5:10-11 “The prophets,” “Job.” They also endured much. The pastors of the Church were seen by James as the successors to the prophets, bringing the message that God is at hand, ready to bring them relief. As Job was blessed in the end, so, too, is the Church in the parousia. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

5:10 *example of suffering* – They like the prophets were afflicted by a (kakopatheia) melancholia, a type of agony which Luther identified as Anfechtung. It is not improbable that “prophets” here, as in Acts 13:1, refers to pastors or elders who now have been martyred and not to OT religious authorities. (Scaer)

They waited for God's judgment rather than trying to enact it themselves. The condemnations they spoke were not their own words but God's (cf 2Ch 36:16). (TLSB)

5:11 *those blessed* – Any Christian who receives strength and patience from the Lord, including the prophets (v 10), Job (v 11), and James's readers. (TLSB)

remained steadfast – Synonymous with “patient” in vv 7–8, 10. (TLSB)

steadfastness of Job. Not “patience.” Job was not patient (Job 3; 12:1–3; 16:1–3; 21:4), but he persevered (Job 1:20–22; 2:9–10; 13:15). This is the only place in the NT where Job is mentioned, though Job 5:13 is quoted in 1Co 3:19. (CSB)

purpose of the Lord – Goals and plans God has for His people; ultimately, eternal life (1:12). This purpose remains even when He permits suffering (v 10). (TLSB)

compassionate and merciful – Characteristics ascribed to Yahweh at the giving of the Ten Commandments. (TLSB)

5:7–11 The return of Jesus in glory shapes the Christian life. Confidence in His return (vv 7–8) gives us a perspective on how we relate to one another (v 9) and our sufferings (v 10). God promises to remain with us and restore us to Himself (v 11). In our shortsighted, self-focused

lives, we dwell on our own problems and try to deal with them ourselves. The quicker we get out of a mess, the better. But this is not God's perspective. He looks at the true goal: eternal life with Him. Consequently, our sufferings can be borne with patience. He gives faith to sustain us through suffering and confidence to endure all things until He comes again. • Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Yet grant me patience as I wait on You. Amen. (TLSB)

5:12 *swear*. Taking an oath. Oaths are unnecessary when one always speaks the truth. Cf Lv 19:12; Mt 23:16–22 (TLSB)

The Prayer of Faith

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** 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. **16** 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. **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. **18** Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. **19** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

5:13-14 What to do while waiting? Deal with personal problems. Be ready; pray. If you have a problem, put it into God's hands. Don't suffer alone. Suffering in the time of James, including persecution, was genuine. By the Christian's prayer, God is given the problem of the saint. The Christian then knows that the one he thinks has abandoned him knows the Christian's afflictions because of God's promises to hear our prayer. The cheerful rejoice—indeed, in songs or prayers of praise. The sick call out to the pastors of the Church to pray for them. The faith of the believer places his trust in God; thus the prayers are acceptable. The prayer of faith is prayed, believing that God will answer. Faith puts its trust in Jesus; therefore, such a faith is always praying (1 Thess 5:17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

5:13-14 *suffering?... cheerful?... sick?* In all circumstances, good or bad, Christians call upon God and trust in His provision, acknowledging that all things happen by His will (cf 4:13–17). (CC)

5:14 *elders*. Leaders among God's people, in both OT (Ex 19:7; 24:1) and NT (Ac 11:30; Ti 1:5); sometimes refers to pastors. (TLSB)

oil. One of the best-known ancient medicines (referred to by Philo, Pliny and the physician Galen; see also Isa 1:6; Lk 10:34). Some believe that James may be using the term medicinally in this passage. Others, however, regard its use here as an aid to faith, an outward sign of the healing to be brought about by God in response to "prayer offered in faith" (v. 15; see Mk 6:13). (CSB)

Anointing is a physical sign accompanying the prayer much like incense is Levitical worship (Ex. 30). In the ancient world, oil was used for medicinal purposes (cf. Lk 10:34). Here it is placed on the person while praying, marking that person as one set apart for God's care. A similar

practice is described in Mk. 6:13. The anointing oil in Ex. 30:22-31 had a similar function, marking certain items as holy, dedicated to God. (TLSB)

in the name of the Lord. Indicating that it is the Lord who heals, according to His will. (TLSB)

5:15 *prayer of faith.* Prayer spoken from faith (cf 1:6). (TLSB)

save. Gk word can mean “heal,” which is more appropriate here, though salvation is also in view in v 16. (TLSB)

raise him up. Make him better physically (Mk 2:9; Lk 7:14), but also with a view toward the ultimate goal of the resurrection of the dead in Christ. So in Ac 3:1–4:22, Peter raised up the lame man and announced that by the name of Jesus “whom God raised from the dead” (3:15; 4:10) the man was healed. (TLSB)

James is in eschatological thought. He uses future tense, “the prayer of faith will save.” Salvation is in this fullness, though it is yet to be completed. Christ has paid the price, the promise is bestowed, but it will “be completed by God at His own choosing” (David P. Scaer, *James, the Apostle of Faith* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983], 133). “Raise him up” is a promise of the Last Day, not of a certain physical cure. The sick and the oppressed ought to focus on the ultimate deliverance of salvation and resurrection and not on the present trials. Indeed, he will raise him up, for he has shed his blood to provide the forgiveness of sins. Of that we can be sure! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

committed sins, he will be forgiven. Illness is sometimes a consequence of specific sins (Dt 28:58–62; 1Co 11:29–30), but not always (Jn 9:1–3). Still, sickness and death are consequences of our general fallen condition. In Christ, God is able to heal our bodies, which He will raise up on the Last Day. (TLSB)

5:16 *confess your sins to one another.* “Here the reference is not to confession made to priests, but is the reconciliation of brothers to each other. Confession should be mutual” (Ap XIIB 12). God directs us to confess our sins to others as to Him, and to forgive sins in His name. The confession of sins to one another is implied in Mt 18:15–16. Cf Mk 1:5; 1Jn 1:9. Luther: “Conduct yourselves in such a way that each humbles himself before the other and confesses his guilt, if he has offended someone” (AE 36:356). (TLSB)

Prayer and confession of sins is not just for the sick, but for the whole Christian life, not just during the life-threatening incidents. The call is to the Church to confess her sins one to another and to pray, praying for one another, asking God’s forgiveness after confessing. God has been offended by the behavior of those who disregard others, previously mentioned through the Epistle. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

Rather than leaving the saints feeling abandoned, James directs them to confession and prayer with the assurance once again that they have God’s abundant grace in Christ Jesus. For their sin he died; for their forgiveness he rose—and he still cares for them and will care for them to all eternity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

righteous person. One who is righteous by faith; same as one who prays “in faith” (Jas 1:6; cf 5:15). (TLSB)

“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” Scaer suggests this paraphrase: “The prayer engendered by God in the man whom He has justified is extremely effective” (Scaer, 134). Prayer is indeed God’s work in the believer. He has made us his own people. Justification is not our work, but God’s! He creates faith in us and enables us to live in faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources Volume 19, Part 4)

power. God’s response to prayer, which accomplishes what human will and strength cannot. Luther: “ ‘The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects’ if it is serious and persistent.... God intends to test you to see whether you can hold on tight, and to teach you that your prayer is not displeasing to Him or unheard, simply because His answer is delayed and you are permitted to go on seeking and knocking” (AE 21:234–35). (TLSB)

5:17-18 *nature like ours.* Human and a sinner. (TLSB)

did not rain ... gave rain. God’s power was seen in His answer to sinful Elijah’s prayer. (TLSB)

5:17 *Elijah ... prayed.* That Elijah prayed may be assumed from 1Ki 17:1; 18:41–46. The three and a half years (see also Lk 4:25) are probably a round number (half of seven), based on 1Ki 18:1 (see note there; cf. Rev 11:1–6). (CSB)

5:19-20 Summarizes the entire Letter. (TLSB)

Finally, James urges the pastors to deal with their erring brothers. Those who wander from the truth were those who were denying some truth of the faith. Those who went and dealt with their false teaching would rescue not only the erring, but also their congregations. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

5:19 *wanders from the truth.*† Fall into any error—either in doctrine or in Christian living. (CSB)

Strays from right teaching (“word of truth”; 1:18) and right living (“false to the truth”; 3:14). (TLSB)

brings back. Implies seeking out one who has wandered, in order to restore him through confession and forgiveness. (TLSB)

5:20 *his soul.* Of the sinner who is brought back. (TLSB)

from death. The person left in sin will die in sin (1:15; cf 5:15). (TLSB)

cover over a multitude of sins. The sins of the wanderer will be forgiven by God. (CSB)

More than we can number; God forgives all our sins. (TLSB)

5:12–20 James has been calling sinners to repentance, and here he exhorts the entire congregation to do the same. No aspect of our lives is private, only between “me and God.” We hide behind facades of perfection, but sin and its consequences pervade every aspect of our lives. Left on our own, we would perish. But our Lord has given us a community of fellow saints to hear our confession, pray for our needs, and restore us when we err. We hear His Gospel from them. God continuously sends into our lives those who pray for us, sing praise with us, and speak God’s

words of forgiveness to us. As His people, healed in body and soul, we may approach His throne of grace with confidence. • I place my life into Your hands, Lord. Save me, heal me, and use my voice to praise You, to pray for my brothers and sisters, and to speak Your forgiving Word. Amen. (TLSB)