

James 5 • End Times Faith

Introduction

The main focus throughout James' letter has been to describe true faith; that is, true Christianity. He concludes by teaching what true Christianity looks like in the shadow of the End Times, how it conducts itself so as to continue proving itself separate and apart from the ways of this world. It's important to note that James does not talk about specific events, signs or wonders, but is completely focused on what is much more important: how a Christian lives in these times. This is the greater teaching that is provided by Christ and all the apostles, that the Last Days are not a test of knowledge, but faith.

¹Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³Your 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! ⁴Behold, 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. ⁵You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

[Read v.1-6]

Q: What is the first sin identified in v.1-3?

A: Hoarding.

Q: How did they fail to see the big picture of the effects of this sin?

A: Since they're unaware that this is taking place "in the last days" (v.3), they're not living for Christ's return but only for their personal comfort and pleasure.

Q: What is the second sin identified in v.4?

A: Stealing wages.

Q: How did they fail to see the big picture of the effects of this sin?

A: Because there were no immediate consequences, they believed God would not respond to their fraud and theft. The "Lord of Sabaoth" is also translated in Scripture as "Lord of hosts", which means "Lord of armies", a reference to the future when God will, at His own appointed time, come with His heavenly armies and personally make everything right.

Q: What is the third sin identified in v.5?

A: Extravagant living.

Q: How did they fail to see the big picture of the effects of this sin?

A: Using money they had obtained through fraud and theft, they were spending everything on themselves, forsaking all others. Like an animal being fattened for its day of sacrifice, they were fattening themselves for the day of judgment without realizing it.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

1 Timothy 6:17

Q: What is the fourth sin identified in v.6?

A: Injustice.

Q: How did they fail to see the big picture of the effects of this sin?

A: Whenever the righteous man "does not resist you", it means that they have left their case in the hands of the Righteous Judge. God's judgment will ultimately come in the end.

Q: How do these sins combine into a basic, overall picture? What kind of person is being described?

A: These are people focused on material things. They're a consumer-driven group giving no real thought to how behavior in this life shapes their outcome in the next life.

Point: In the book of Revelation, Jesus describes such End Times behavior as the church of Laodicea, someone who has deceived themselves into thinking that material blessings somehow equal spiritual blessings. In the Last Days, the wrong application of material wealth will lead many astray.

⁷Therefore 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. ⁸You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹We 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.

[Read v.7-11]

Q: What is the repeated theme in James' teaching on the right attitude for the Last Days?

1. "Therefore be **patient**..." (v.7)
2. "The farmer waits...being **patient**..." (v.7)
3. "...be **patient**..." (v.8)
4. "...an example...of suffering and **patience**..." (v.10)
5. "We count those blessed who **endured**." (v.11)
6. "...the **endurance** of Job..." (v.11)

Q: Does James' uses of the word "patient" mean that we're to sit idly by, doing nothing?

A: No, it carries with it the implicit idea of "endurance", which is a call to bear the burdens and fight the spiritual battles until Jesus returns.

Q: What is the meaning of James' first illustration of patience in v.7-8 of the farmer?

A: We plant the seed and prepare the soil but cannot immediately reap a crop. God send the rains to water the soil, and **THEN** comes the harvest. We must be patient and tend to our work in the mean time.

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Galatians 6:9

Q: What is the meaning of James' second illustration of the Judge in v.9?

A: If we truly understood that Jesus is "standing right at the door", we would be less likely to question or complain, knowing He's not only near, but can hear us.

Point: Even our speech is to show patience.

Q: What is the meaning of James' third illustration of the prophets in v.10-11?

A: Job is the classic example of Old Testament believers who suffered at the hands of sinners, yet left the outcome in the hands of God. In the midst of such trials, Job and the like did not understand what God was doing, but by enduring to the end they discovered God's wonderful purpose and result: compassion and mercy.

Q: What is the overall End Times application of James' teaching to this point?

A: We must be patient to endure faithfully even when we are wronged. We must trust that the injustices and inequities of this present life will probably go unresolved in this life. This is why we look forward to Christ's return, when the Judge will resolve all things.

¹²But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

[Read v.12]

Q: Is James speaking only of oaths? What is the greater quality of End Times faith which Christians are supposed to exhibit?

A: We're supposed to have such honest speech that we don't need to prop up our promises with oaths.

Point: *The corrupt rich men did not keep their promises, but Christians must always keep their word even if it hurts them personally. We are called not just to keep our speech pure where fellow Christians are concerned (v.9), but with everyone.*

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

[Read v.13-18]

Q: So what are two additional activities James identifies as necessary to maintain one's faith – one's Christianity – in the End Times?

A: Prayer and confession of sins.

Q: Does James guarantee that ALL prayer will be effective?

A: It's interesting that he qualifies it by calling it "prayer offered in faith" (v.15) and as coming from "a righteous man" (v.16).

Point: *Prayer is a powerful tool when employed in combination with spiritual faithfulness; that is, the exclusive pursuit of obedience to God's Word and ways, the end result of which the Bible calls "righteousness". The more consistent our faithfulness in times of peace, the better the chances it will translate into the kind of faith we'll need in times of trials and hardship.*

Q: What is the hope given for us "regular folk" in the example of Elijah?

A: "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours". (v.17) He had to battle all the same issues of sin, temptation, and trials just the same as us. The great things accomplished through him can be accomplished through us if, like him, we are daily obedient. Elijah wasn't supernaturally gifted where patience and endurance were concerned, but had to learn and submit the same as we ourselves must.

¹⁹My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

[Read v.19-20]

Q: What is the final quality of End Times faith?

A: Soul-winning.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

Point: *We can become so wrapped up in our own trials that we forget the needs of the lost and of believers who have strayed. Regardless of how bad the circumstances – prison, in the midst of a shipwreck, persecution, etc. – the apostles always realized that this very situation was an opportunity to win souls for the Kingdom.*

Overall Application

So many books, conferences, and web sites dedicated to the discussion of the End Times overwhelmingly focus on the dates, events, and signs that will accompany it, but far less on what God's Word teaches that His people should do during those times. James' bullet points are:

- Be patient and endure, even if you are wronged. (v.1-11)
- Remain pure in speech. (v.12)
- Remain prayerful, continuing to confess one's sins. (v.13-18)
- Be persistent in winning souls for the kingdom. (v.19-20)

In other words, we are called to live **EXACTLY** the same during the End Times as during every single, normal day of our life. Being faithful to God's Word and ways alone in the course of everyday life is what will enable us to remain faithful during the very Last Days.

Some people are preparing for the End Times by saving money, storing supplies, or other types of material preparations. What are you doing **NOW** that will make the most difference **THEN**?