



Stanground Baptist Church – Sunday 15th November 2020

James 5 v 7-12

Today we are continuing our series of talks based on the letter of James in the New Testament.

This letter was written in about AD 49 by James, the brother of Jesus, who was a leader of the early church in Jerusalem. The letter was written to the Jewish Christians who had been forced to leave their home country because of persecution. The purpose of the letter was to help these early church members to distinguish between the right and wrong ways of living as a Christian and to encourage them to put their faith into action.

In chapters 1 & 2 James outlines some of the general principles of the Christian life including how we should behave. Then in chapter 3 he writes about the importance of controlling our speech and explains the differences between earthly and heavenly wisdom. In chapter 4 James encourages us to obey God in all things and to stop trusting in our own plans or possessions.

In chapter 5 (part of which we are thinking about today) James encourages the early Christians (and us) to be patient in all things (particularly when we suffer for our faith) and to be honest and sincere in any promises we make.

Let's look at today's bible reading in four separate sections:

Verses 7 & 8

The early church was suffering opposition and persecution and, because of that, the believers had been scattered and were longing for Jesus to return (sooner rather than later).

In these verses James compares this waiting for the Lord's return to the life of a farmer waiting for his crop to grow and mature. The farmer cannot hurry the process but he doesn't sit at home with his feet up – there is still a lot he can be doing to prepare for the harvest that will eventually come – like tending, weeding and protecting his crops.

In the same way, we must patiently wait for Christ's return – we cannot make Him come back any sooner but, while we wait, there is still a lot of work we can be doing in God's service and to advance His kingdom.

The farmer and the Christian must both live by faith looking forward to a future reward – we need to remember that Christ will return in God's own time and not ours.

During the current lock-down some of us may feel that we are in the "end times" and that Christ will return soon but Jesus himself told us (in Matthew 24 verses 36 and 42) - "No-one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" – "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come". We should not speculate about the date of Christ's return but we must be ready for that day (whenever it may be).

Verse 9

James goes on to remind his readers and us that, when things go wrong, we shouldn't grumble or try and pin the blame on someone else.

It is a natural human reaction to try and blame someone else when things go wrong and this is often easier than taking our own share of the responsibility. We need to remember that pointing the finger at someone else can often be wrong and hurtful to that other person.

Remember - when you point your finger at someone else there are three fingers pointing back at yourself.



Before we start to pass judgment on anyone, we need to remember that one day we will have to stand before God and give an account of our own actions – He will not let us get away with shifting the blame onto someone else.

Verses 10 & 11

In these verses James gives some words of encouragement to those early Christians who were in danger because of opposition and persecution. He reminds his readers about some of the people in the Old Testament who had also undergone suffering but had come through it by persevering. He particularly mentions Job but I'm sure his Jewish readers would also have been familiar with other OT characters who had suffered and were persecuted for their faith – such as Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah.

The message of these verses is that, whenever we suffer for our faith, God will be with us and He will help us through the adversities. Our sufferings will pale into insignificance when compared to the hope we have of an eternal future in God's presence – because as verse 11 says "the Lord is full of compassion and mercy".

In Romans 8 v 37 the apostle Paul reminds us that if we share in Christ's sufferings we will also share in His glory.

Verse 12

In this verse James tells us not to swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. James is not only telling us to stop using swear words but he is also talking about the swearing of an oath.

I'm sure we've all watched court cases in films or tv programmes where the witnesses are asked to hold the bible in their right hand and then to repeat the words "I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth".

Some Christians over the years have been unwilling to swear this oath quoting the words of James 5 verse 12 as their reason for refusing – in fact my own mother would not swear the oath when we were applying for Probate after my dad died but she chose to make an affirmation instead.

I'm not sure whether mum was right or wrong – but what is the bible really trying to tell us here?

I think that James is encouraging us to always speak truthfully because, if we exaggerate or tell lies, we will quickly get found out and people will stop believing anything we say.

Remember the story of the shepherd boy who cried "wolf" so often when there was no wolf around, that the villagers stopped believing him. When a wolf really came and the boy cried "wolf" the villagers ignored him and, as a result, they lost their valuable flocks. The simple message being that liars are not believed even when they sometimes speak the truth.

The message of James is that we should always be honest so that other people will believe our straight forward "yes" or "no" and we will become known as people who can be trusted.

Summary

This section of the letter of James teaches us four main things:

- We should be patient in awaiting the Lord's return (v 7 & 8)
- We should not rush to judge other people (v 9)
- We should trust God to help us through our times of suffering (v 10 & 11)
- We should become known as people who can be trusted (v 12)

I pray that each one of us will ask for the help of God's Holy Spirit so that we can apply these important principles in our own individual lives.

Amen.