

Sermon notes from yesterday

Inbox



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James 5 v1-11. 'The coming of the risen King'.

We only need to read a newspaper, watch news on TV or look at social media to be reminded of the evil that men and women can do to each other and we are therefore as representatives of CHRIST called to address these issues. Perhaps it's the passage of time or maybe the era of the individual that has brought out in greater depth recently the responsibility to stand against injustice. Bonhoeffer, a man ahead of his time, said: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing". We will be remarking on three themes this morning from the passage in James we have just heard read...

1. What should be our attitude to giving? James gives us two opposing responses...

Firstly, the attitude of the amoral wealthy, the 'get rich quick', it doesn't matter what it takes to get there. I don't know if you have ever met someone with that attitude, I have met a couple and they were the most scary people I have ever met, their only interest in you was whether you could be of some influence for them in their climb up the ladder. Jesus said, 'What good is it to gain the whole world and lose your soul?' These are people who set out to possess great riches and find that they have become possessed with them. Again, James stands with Jesus and the OT prophets in his condemnation of avarice and the misuse of wealth. Riches do not bring spiritual benefit or hope for judgement day. I have seen more Christians who have succumbed to the lure of wealth than any other thing. When will you stop accumulating money? When will you be wealthy enough? The other thing about money is that it consumes you, it makes you want to hoard it: there are now many people in the

world today who have so much that they could never spend it all! As we know on a local scale, when there is a shortage of some food that there will be those who hoard it and thus create a shortage, so on a worldwide scale, this can cause greater trials for the hungry and even starvation. You may well have noticed that food prices have risen above inflation this last year. People are struggling. There are those who are able to delay payment to the single self-employed man or woman who cannot afford to take them to court-I know, I've been there! In James's time the day labourer was utterly dependent on receiving his wage at the end of the day so that he could buy food for his family-Jesus and parable of workers in the vineyard. We thank God for those landowners like Boaz, whom we have been reading about in the book of Ruth. But many rich people happily ignored their pleas and the Law of Moses in Deuteronomy 24v14,15: Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.' Has your love of wealth and what it brings you edged out Christ from the centre of your heart? Is anyone crying out against you because they remain unpaid?

2. In the Bible, generally the wealthy are seen as self-made: James does not condemn wealth or the system where wealth can be created, but the misuse of this wealth. The Bible consistently insists that the wealthy have responsibilities, this is a constant theme throughout, alongside the call to social justice that is embedded in Mosaic Law. However, wealth is a God-given gift. I'm thankful that I don't have that gift, otherwise it would mean taking decisions on a daily basis on how to give. Most of all, God encourages His children to give generously. Paul, in his letter to the church in Corinth, exclaimed: "God loves a cheerful giver." In the last couple of years, now we have a regular income, I have tried to model the generosity of those who give almost without thinking. There are many rich Christians who use this God-given 'talent' to benefit others. The Bible categorizes the poor as those born that way, destined to live no other way and to die in need of food: not the 'undeserving poor' but those who, despite a life of toil never see any improvement.

2. 'How is your way of life affected by the imminent return of Jesus'?

Perhaps before we study James's points on this question, we should ask of ourselves, 'Do I believe that Christ will return again? There are church leaders today who do not believe in the physical event of Christ's return. They would likely say that the early believers and even Jesus were mistaken and cite the fact that those two groups understood that it would be imminent. Jesus even seemed to claim that there would be some who were alive with Him that would still be alive when He returned. What do we make of this, after all, we live two thousand years on from the likes of Peter and John and at periods throughout that time, there has been a great sense from many in the Church that Christ's return was just around the corner. I grew up when there was a cold war and there was the understanding that we might have a four-minute warning of when the nuclear holocaust would begin. Today that threat and fear has waned, but has been superseded by concerns over the environment. Many perhaps feel that they can relax; life won't suddenly be destroyed globally. However, the word used most frequently in the New Testament about the second coming is 'parousia'. This word was used by the Greeks when describing the invasion of a country by another: this will be the final and complete invasion of earth by heaven and will see the Return of the King! Nobody knows when this will happen, as even Jesus acknowledged. In 2 Peter 3 we are told, 'A day with the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day'. In the next verse, Peter gives the reason for the Lord's seeming slowness, it is because He would not have anyone perish. Where would you have been headed if Christ had returned a year, ten years, fifty years ago? I long for His return, but I also long for the salvation of many more men and women, boys and girls.

3. James moves from attacking the wealthy to encouraging the believers. The patience he encourages them to have is one of the expectant, limited time, variety that has a goal. The three examples he gives are all good illustrations:

- 1. The farmer. He has to wait, he has no choice, but there is normally an inevitable sprouting of the seeds that he has planted.**
- 2. The prophets. They did not see, in many cases, the fulfilment of the prophecies God had commanded them to give and they suffered not because of wrongdoing, but because of their**

commitment to Him and their sure hope that what He had given them to say would come to pass. 'Faithfulness to God's commands so far from giving them immunity from suffering, actually involved them in it'.

- 3. Job. King James version speaks of Job's 'patience', but more accurately, we should speak of his perseverance, his steadfastness. There were times when Job complained bitterly to God, but he never abandoned his faith: those remarkable words, 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him'.**

Just like Job, Jeremiah and I'm sure, some farmers particularly in drought affected areas you may feel at times that God has forgotten: He has forgotten His promises to you and specifically the one that He would return, but cling as Job did to the remnants of your faith, continue to trust Him even when it seems that He stands against you and , as Job lived to witness the restoration of his family and his fortune, we too will witness the demonstration of the compassion and faithfulness of our God! To conclude, those remarkable words from Job: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God'.

Reflections:

Encouragements and Challenges from James 5:1-11

Hold what you have with open hands

What am I doing with what God has entrusted to me? Do my money, possessions and choices demonstrate generosity? Do I notice the needs of others? Do I treat those who work for me or serve me fairly and respectfully? What we possess can become a means of blessing others.

Be patient – but not passive.

We cannot make God's purposes happen according to our timetable, but we can remain faithful while we wait. James says: Keep going. Keep praying. Keep serving. Keep trusting.

Strengthen your heart

Faithfulness is rarely one dramatic decision. More often it is hundreds of small decisions to continue following Christ. Sometimes discipleship involves simply saying, "Today I will continue."

Remember those who have gone before

We are part of a much bigger story. Christians before us have faced persecution, disappointment, illness, uncertainty and loss, and yet discovered that God remained faithful. We persevere because the God we trust is compassionate and merciful.

A final reflection

God sees, God hears, God is coming, and God is full of compassion and mercy.

God bless you, David