

“Authentic Community”

James 5:9-20

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on June 29, 2025

5:9

James has had a great deal to say to us in this relatively brief letter. He wrote instructions and clarifications

that could be at times hard to receive in our flesh. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he clearly felt the importance ...the necessity, to venture into subjects and issues that most would prefer to just sweep under the rug.

I appreciate the fact that in closing, he is bringing us back to the critical importance...*in light of all he had penned herein*, of the bond of community within the local body of Christ. Almost as if to remind us that without such, the rest of the letter he had written to us would fall on deaf ears and hard hearts. Certainly, the scriptures have told us repeatedly, and life has shown us experientially, that without a full commitment to body life and community participation, all the rest of the scripture is lost before we even get out of the gate.

From the beginning of this letter, James seemed to have a lot to say about the tongue, about what we speak. He would move away from it, but would return again to the subject, just as he does here again, as he is coming to a close of this letter. He is issuing a serious warning about what we say...that we must not complain about our situations, trials, and grievances concerning others. We cannot just vent verbally about each other. Scripture is full of warnings concerning this issue, so its safe to say that God won't have it...it's something He will not tolerate. Note the Scripture: if we complain, murmur, and grumble, we shall be condemned. And, "behold, the judge stands before the door." This is a warning. A **strong** warning, in fact. The Lord will judge all believers who complain, murmur, grumble, and judge others instead of falling under the care and authority of Christ and leaning on Him. His judgment is at hand, right at the door, ready to be executed against those who ignore this warning.

James, it appears, was writing this letter to people who were apparently going through a time of persecution and trial. There would be those who would, *like always*, try to “make a run for it,” and many who did...both then and now...would fail to ever find their way back. James seemed to understand the strange phenomenon wherein people, during such times of testing and distress, would inexplicably turn against the very ones who loved them the most and supported them the greatest. It must be the goofiest response there is to testing: *leveling bitterness towards the people around us who try to help us through it!* No matter the context, most Christians are reluctant to assault God for their problems, so they scapegoat the other believers around them as proxies for their unhappiness and bitterness.

In this current world, I can always see it coming. There are always people who will be tested ...outside of their own actions. Just spiritual warfare. And then there are those who are actually rebelling against God and ANY authority in their lives! So often these latter folks will turn to bite the hand that feeds them, so I have learned to



keep my fingers out of their cage. Human nature inevitably wants someone to blame, and I mean someone *else* to blame, because it certainly isn't their fault, whatever the issue is!

It's a sad and incredible thing to come to view your church as the cause for the demise of your marriage, your addictions, your inability to keep a job, your mental struggles, your anger issues, financial mismanagement, your children's rebellion, your inability to keep a job, etc.! It is a curious twist in mankind that, in times of pressure, we actually turn on those who have been there for us through thick and thin. But that's the handiwork of the devil for you! He aims to take from you whatever is good in your world, and a lot of folks are courteous enough to wrap it up and put a bow on it for him! Thus the warning is put out there: "*Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*"

Please note the one individual who IS condemned through such activity: **you**. Not the people that you are venting on or the church family that you are blaming. If only these folks could realize how they look when they project their anger onto others in such situations! But rarely are they deterred. James here makes sure we all know just who is actually judged on these matters. He points out that the judge is not far off and aloof, but rather "at the door." Meaning he can see it all, hear it all, and is close enough to thump you on the head.

What James is seemingly telling us as he comes to the close of this letter is, "*Set your house in order. Get it together before He comes...*" How sad it is to see grown men who love the salvation of Christ but can't seem to even get "out of the gate" when it comes to the very real, practical and everyday exercise of their faith. I'm not trying to be intolerant and impatient in this matter! Not one of us will ever arrive at the spiritual "rest area," but come on... *seriously*...are you fighting the same battles as you did when you first were saved and there has yet to be any real progress?

After years of walking in Christ, do you still have to be told not to have pre-marital sex, not to watch porn? To get a job? Not to abuse drugs, alcohol, or food? To love your wife? To stand by your word and the word God has spoken to you? To have a personal devotional life? To have family devotions? To serve church and Jesus? To be a part of community? This is what the writer of Hebrews is trying to say to us in chapter six, verse one:

"So let us stop going over the basic teachings about Christ again and again. Let us go on instead and become mature in our understanding. Surely we don't need to start again with the fundamental importance of repenting from evil deeds and placing our faith in God" (NLT).

Sadly, James is still having to tell his people not to grumble, complain and gossip about other people. A sad picture of people who refuse to grow up.

5:10-11

James points out that, like us, the people to whom he was writing tended to look up to and admire those warriors of the faith who had gone on before them. We all do that too. We stand in awe of the Spurgeons, the George Mullers, the D.L. Moodys, and the Jim and Elizabeth Elliots. But *admire* does not mean *imitate*. Notice that when you are an active servant of Christ, suffering always seems to precede patience. AW Tozer once said, "Before God can use a man greatly, he must hurt him deeply." So actually imitating these folks is a far greater task! Oh, how we all wish we were those kinds of people! However, many of us are still too much in love with ourselves...too self preserving, and still too controlled by our flesh, to ever live a faithful life that would matter on that kind of grand scale. Or really, most often, even the *local* one.'

The worst part is that we have not only excused ourselves in this matter, but we have gone further by even *sanctioning* our failure and unwillingness. We think, "Well, Spurgeon obviously didn't have the wife that I

have!" or, "D.L. Moody must not have had the school loans that I have incurred, and I guess Muller had better work hours than me." Seriously? Are we so brash as to minimize the sacrifice, the expense, the patient endurance that these folks lived out in order to excuse our own laziness, worldliness, and fears?

James is pulling us all up short, calling us to be real men, to be faithful women, and to be people who have integrity, to speak honestly and stand by our word. Not to raise our hands in worship and then tell the Spirit "no" on the way out the door to our cars. James...and God Himself, is calling us to man up and exercise some mature patience! We must make note that patience in Christianity means more than merely standing and waiting without losing your cool. It speaks rather of fortitude and steadfastness; enduring qualities that have a positive and offensive attribute in Kingdom building, not just a defensive pose as in "gritting our teeth."

James gives Job as an "how-to" example. Few people ever suffer the trials and temptations of life as much as Job suffered. He suffered utter bankruptcy—the loss of all his property, livestock, and employees—and then, in the severest blow of all, all of his children died. And then...as if things couldn't get any worse, his wife got all up in his face because he refused to complain and told him he needed to "curse God and then die." Yet check it out... Job never gave in to the trials or temptations. He never forsook his faith in God. He did not understand all that was happening to him, but he refused to turn against God. He waited...he patiently endured...

We, as true followers of Christ, are *called* to...are *expected* to, endure To persevere...to fight and survive. But remember, you cannot persevere unless there actually *is* a trial in your life. There can be no victories without battles; there can be no peaks without valleys. If you want the blessing, you must be prepared to carry the burden and fight the fight.

5:12

Wouldn't the world be a very different place if we just did that? You know...if when you tell me you love me that I could really count on that? If when we said we are called to do something, or God told us clearly to do or not do something and we agreed, that such meant we are actually going to follow through with that? But our generation is a generation where lying comes easy it seems, and we back-peddle from our words as if we had said nothing. Sadly, if you do that a few times, that's exactly what your word will be worth to those around you: nothing. This is certainly classic and expected in the world, but shouldn't the faith community be radically different? Certainly Paul thinks so, as he writes in Ephesians, "...*filthiness, foolish talking...fornication, and all uncleanness...covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as is fitting for saints...*"

This may all seem rather idyllic to you, and perhaps you are just left with a whole lot of questions now. Lots of questions that generally all dance around the one big one, which is: "How are we supposed to do all of this?" Well, for sure, any failure on your part is not the churches' fault. Whenever we direct our displeasure and/or our personal manic at the church community or someone specifically in it, we are in trouble. Doing so is only showing that your heart and mind are not right about just what a faith community, a pastor, and brothers and sisters are supposed to be... and do.... when it comes to your faith. Where does James say we are to go with our issues?

5:13-16

It's clear that the local community, which you are a part of, is to participate in your spiritual journey and seeking, but they are not your ultimate path or answer. They do not give you the respite... or the solutions you seek, nor can they be blamed when God does not reply to you in the pre-determined way that you believe He should! Suffering? **Pray.** Cheerful? **Sing.** Sick? "***Gather up those who lead amongst you and then all of you can pray together!***"

“Confess to each other.” Not because someone else can do anything for you heavenly wise, but because it’s good for you to have earthly accountability. ***“Pray for one another.”*** That doesn’t sound like any one individual’s prayers are heard or responded to more than another, except for maybe this “righteous man” mentioned here. But if you have to actually go looking for such a guy, maybe the answer would be rather for ***you*** to be a righteous man yourself and then your “fervent prayers” will “avail much” too!

5:17-18

Verse 16 tells us, *“The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”* So, does that mean if I am not a stellar Christian I am therefore left out in the cold? Well, it doesn’t say “stellar.” It says *righteous*. The fact is, I am only righteous by the shed blood of Christ and my reception of that work He completed. God sees me as righteous when I am covered by the forgiveness and grace of Christ.

So true salvation and rebirth determine that righteous standing, not by some cosmic scorecard somewhere. James elaborates on this thought by reminding us that Elijah, the great prophet and man of God, had a nature like ours. You know, a sinner with a wicked heart like us? Yet he sought God, and God answered. God *always* answers. He may say yes, no, or He may say wait. But He always answers if you are that righteous man James spoke of.

For Elijah, one of the greatest aspects of what he was seeking was the glorification of the Father, not laying his hands on a new sports car or perhaps a date with that cute girl down at the corner fast-food outlet. We are apt to think that because God says no, He has failed to answer. Often, this is the very catalyst for our exit from the body of Christ. Such thinking only reveals our limited understanding of what prayer truly is, and our role in it.

Prayer isn’t tapping into a genie in a bottle where we get three wishes. It is communication with the Lord of our life, and therefore is innately infused with, ***“Thy will be done, Lord.”*** This does not mean God doesn’t give us stuff just to rock our world, for Scripture tells us that He “loves to give good gifts to his kids” (Matt 7:11). But when we ask anything of Him, is our first and foremost desire that His response would glorify ***him***? Do we trust Him to do the right thing by us?

The background on Elijah’s prayer is found in 1 Kings 17 and 18, and it was not a prayer for some personal luxury to be consumed or enjoyed. It was a prayer for God to pour out His power to show the world His glory. And indeed He did!

And in the finale, James leaves us with this:

5:19-20

This passage seems to speak not about the entrenched unbeliever, but rather the one who has come to know the truth, and, for some reason, has wandered away. Why and how does such a journey occur?

“Well, it’s been said that ‘at the heart of every problem lies a problem of the heart.’ Often a person stops traveling with the body of Christ when a problem in his heart causes him to be uncomfortable in the presence of God’s people. Such was the case with Demas. ‘Demas has forsaken us,’ said Paul. Why? Because ‘he has loved this world’ (see 2 Timothy 4:10).” (from Jon Courson Commentary)

James tells us that if we intervene and manage to pull the individual back into the community of God, and they come back to the feet of Jesus, we can be a part of rescuing them from death. What kind of death is this passage speaking of?

Well, we must consider first that such can be literal and physical. 1 John 5:16 speaks of a sin, a rebellion against God, that can result in God actually taking a person home prematurely if the person will not stand down. If that individual keeps roaming further away from God, he can endanger others by his apostasy as well as the reputation of the Kingdom of God. So God in His mercy may say, "It's time to take this person to heaven." That individual may make it to heaven, but the fact is he will enter in "as though by fire." Eternal life yes, but lacking the rewards that will affect his ability to fully engage the heavenly realm (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Second, we must consider that James is referring to those who "danced amongst us" but in fact never were truly converted. Sadly, this happens all the time around here. If we can run "tight end" and head him off, we can be party to the salvation of his very soul from spiritual death because the wages of sin is always death. That's Scripture.

Whether a person on the run is saved or not, I cannot tell you. But I can say without question that such a one's eternal destiny is in danger. James, I believe, wasn't trying to be condemning. He was just trying, as he has throughout this blunt letter, to speak straight and call us to a straight path. No doubt, in hopes of turning a sinner from the error of his way, in hopes of saving a soul from death.