

Roy's Sermon For July 30, 2023

James 5:6-9 'Stand Firm Because The Lord Is At Hand!'

Last week we began chapter 5 of James by looking at v1-6. 'Beware Of Having The Heart Of A Hoarder', I called it. After addressing those wealthy merchants who believed that they had ownership of tomorrow, even making their bold plans for the future in chapter 4:13-17, as though they had it all in the palm of their own hands. He then speaks to those out and out rich oppressive pagans among the believers. Because as in most churches and Christian communities, there will always be goats among the sheep and tares among the wheat! He addresses those wealthy heavy handed people. V1: "Now listen," as in v13 of chapter 4: "Now listen you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming up on you." No, not even a call to repentance. It's only prepare yourselves for the coming judgement! Because "the misery," of the righteous anger of God is going to fall upon you.

And I made the point, that unlike this call from God, one of the clearest indications of our societies spiralling fall into godless depravity, is the absence of any real consequences for one's own actions today! In some states teenagers will soon be able to steal, assault, rape and even murder, with absolute impunity, up until the age of 14. Because until then, they supposedly don't know right from wrong.

But God says: "Weep and wail." Yes prepare for judgement! In v2, James points to those worldly riches in which these wealthy people took pride and held their security. The crops in their store houses had rotted and moths had chewed their way through their designer clothes. So they had "hoarded," they had surrounded themselves with all of their wealth, but to no avail. And even those things that couldn't perish, (their silver and gold) we're actually corroding away. Which was symbolic of the wasting away, of their self-obsessed, empty lives: "You have hoarded your wealth in the last days." Their lives were coming to an end, but instead of turning to God in repentance and seeking forgiveness, their wealth consumed them! v4, they had built their empires upon the stolen wages of their workers.

But the cries of those stolen earnings had risen up to God. v5, "Self-indulgence" was their creed and v6, the pillaging and plundering of the poor and innocent was their life's goal. Yes: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, then for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven. And yet Even so praise Jesus: that "with God all things are possible" Jesus said!

And so we pick up the letter in James 5:7-9 under the heading: 'Stand Firm Because The Lord Is At Hand!' But before we come to these final messages in the book of James, let us remind ourselves of who the letter was originally written to. If you remember, at the death of Stephen in Acts Chapter 7:51-60, (and the bold defence of Christ's gospel and Stephen's own faith throughout the whole of Chapter 7, and Saul's "giving his approval to Stephen's" martyrdom.

We read in chapter 8:1: "on that day I great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." Yes all of the words of this letter have been written to the churches of the diaspora. Those scattered persecuted brethren of the Jerusalem churches! We need to keep reminding ourselves that that is the context of the letter. Yes the church was being persecuted so James writes these things to them to encourage, to strengthen, and to warn the believers to stand firm in the midst of such tremendous difficulties. Because the prize, is eternally worth it! And he uses the word "brothers," "agapetoi," five times in

these last 14 verses! In chapter one, (after confessing his unworthiness of owning the earthly connection to Jesus through them having the same mother, by calling himself James a “dolos,” a slave of Jesus in verse one. He then began in verses 2-3 by writing: “Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” Yes that word “Hupomonais,” endurance. Meaning I remain!

And now in v7 of chapter 5 he writes: “Be patient then brothers, until the Lord's coming.” Yes after addressing those rich pagans, be they Jew or Gentile, who needed to prepare for judgement, he returns again to his first love. Even the apple of his eye we might say. Those who make up the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, his church. Those who were bearing the brunt of those previous people. Those rich oppressors: “be patient, then brothers. The word patient here in Greek is: “Makrothumesate” and it literally means “be ye long suffering.” Beloved, how important that “hupomenes” that endurance, yes that remaining of chapter 1:3 and this “Makrothumesate” this “long suffering,” were for the early church. And friends they are equally so for us today. Why does Paul speak in 1 Corinthians 9:24 and following, about the marathon runners “running to receive the prize?”

And in Galatians 2:2, of his fear that he had: “run his race among the Galatians in vain?” That some of their actions appeared to testify that he had not been among them at all? And in Galatians 5:7, he speaks of them “running a good race,” but then asking: “Who cut in on you?” That you would deviate from the path of obedience? Yes “who cut you off” from “running the good race?” And then finally, in 2 Timothy 4:7, with his parting words as he knows he's about to die, those words of his epitaph as we saw some years ago: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Why are these things so important to the Christian walk? Because the race is long, and there are so many difficulties that the person who is truly seeking to follow and serve the Lord Jesus, will face! And only he or she who “Makrothumesate” is longsuffering, and who “hupomenes” who endures, who remains, while others are departing, “will be saved.” Jesus Himself said in Matthew 10:22: “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” And He also said in Matthew 24: “Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most, (notice he says not some but) most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

Yes brothers and sisters, the road to glory is long for the believer. And there are many discouragements and difficulties which we face along the way: “All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” And “Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Not might be, but “will be saved.” So according to Jesus, Paul, and James, it's all about staying the course. “Standing firm” until the end in the face of everything, that Satan throws at us!

Beloved in the light of the reality of these words, I want you to reflect upon your own life's experience, as you have sought to walk with the Lord. Do Jesus' Words ring true? Have you not seen so many of those, who have had the appearance of people who were following Jesus even for many many years, (some perhaps for decades) and yet, as “the wickedness of the world” in which we live “increases” with growing depravity and evil, we look around for them, and they are nowhere to be seen. And when each of these people turn their back on Jesus and his sacrifice, they take a piece of our heart with them. And perhaps an even bigger piece, when they are family or friends that we love and have invested in with our labours in the Lord. Yes those whom we have wrapped our arms and hearts around, when we've called them brother, or sister!

“As wickedness increases” Jesus said, “most will have their love grow cold” and “All men will hate you because of me.” More and more we all know this to be true. We've all watched the evil rise in our country and we have seen it coming. And it continues to rise and come against us, this is the Christian's reality today. As it was in the time of Jesus, Paul and James!

Friends, again I ask the question, (all of these things being the case) what was one of the most important things that he needed to remind his scattered persecuted sheep of? As he echoes Jesus' own words. “hupomones” remain, though everyone else depart. And “Makrothumesate” “be ye long suffering therefore brothers, until the Lord's coming. Because he who stands firm to the end will be saved!” No it's not a sprint this Christian life dear friends, it's a marathon!

Brothers and Sisters, I don't know how many people I've seen seemingly burning bright for Jesus over the years, but then as I said earlier, when trials come and wickedness increases you turn around, and they are nowhere to be found. “Be long suffering therefore brothers until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.” Or as in the older translation: “Behold the farmer awaits the precious fruit of the earth being long suffering over it. Until he receives the early and latter rains.”

Friends can you see? That the example which James gives us is not of someone just sitting around doing nothing, no. He has tilled the soil, yes he has painstakingly prepared the ground. He has carefully sewn the seed, sometimes even one by one and where he can, he has applied the fertiliser. Yes he is “long suffering” doing all that he can, and then he waits for God's life giving rains, so he can bring forth God's “fruit of the earth” for all of his labours. And both of these rains were crucial for the crop. The first rains the rains of sowing bring forth life, and the latter rains strengthened and nourished the plants making them ready for harvest!

It's a wonderful metaphor to explain the Christian life. Those first sprinklings of the gospel, as they are poured out upon the seed that has been planted in us by God the Holy Spirit, bring forth new life in the child of God. And those latter rains, which continue to fall upon us throughout our walk with the Lord, as we sit under the preaching and studying of the Word of God, strengthen us, and grow us into healthy and mature believers ready to be taken up, come the Great day and dreadful of the Lord!

O friends, amidst the wickedness of our day, the inexplicable vehemence of the world's hatred towards us. In the midst of it all, (as the farmer waits for the Lord to give life to his crop) they believe and wait in their faithfulness, for the coming of the Lord! Brethren I ask you yet again, why do we “remain” and endure while so many today are turning their back on God? Why do we set ourselves to be “long suffering” in a world that hates us for our allegiance to Jesus? Why should we pour ourselves out for our Saviour in this world that is increasingly evil and anti Christ? When so often it feels as though we are casting pearls before swine? “Because the Lord is coming.” And when He comes, that “long suffering” will be over, and we will spend eternity together in the presence of the king. The word before us for “coming” here in Greek is “Parousia” and it can mean “coming,” or advent, but it can also mean “presence.”

Friends we long for our “Lord's coming” so we can be forever in “His presence.” Why do we pray “Come Lord Jesus come?” So we can know an end to all of these trials of life, with their sadnesses and hardships at the hands of those who are opposed to our King! In v8, James repeats the call to perseverance: “Be also long suffering,” (like that farmer among his toils) “and stand firm.” The NASV says: “Strengthen your hearts.” In Greek it's: “Establish your hearts.” It's the word “steruxate” and it means steady yourself. Be immovable. Steadfast, firmly rooted. Like the crops of that farmer, that

have received the latter rains of strengthening and maturity. Yes: "Stand firm in your hearts." And why? "Because the Lord is coming is near" Literally it reads: "Because the coming (or the presence of the Lord has drawn near."

Friends think about it. Almost 2000 years ago, James wrote these words to strengthen and encourage his brethren that were being pursued and belted from all sides. And what better way to do this than to get them to lift their vision, or as Blanchard puts it in his commentary: to get them to 'live looking up.' Because the second coming of the Lord had drawn near! The NASV reads: "For the coming of the Lord is at hand." It was so close that the believers of the day could almost reach out and touch it! Beloved how much closer then is it today, this His "coming," this "presence" of the Lord? Over 500 years before the Lord came the first time Daniel saw His ascension and return to His heavenly throne. In Daniel 7:13 we read: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven." 600 years later John also saw Him with the exact same vision in Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."

And finally, when Paul knew that he was not long for this world, as he knew that his martyrdom was imminent. It's as though he saw Jesus' return as he recorded these words: 2 Timothy 4:1: "In the presence of God, and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his Kingdom, I give you this charge: preach the word." Yes it was as though Paul could see Jesus' return, and there was an urgency about his words to Timothy. And it is as though he were saying: Even as you and I know that I have not much time left, and I'm about to be poured out on Christ's altar for His gospel, neither do you have much time my son in the faith. Because "Jesus' return is near, so preach the word." Friends as one of the reformers was known to say: 'Preach as a dying man to dying men.' Yes we must live, while we are looking up!

Beloved ask yourself, How often do you actually think like this? Yes how often do you even give the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ an actual thought? As I said some weeks ago, we can tend to go on living day after day, believing that our lives will just go on and on, even as though nothing will change. Yes that this perishing world will go on and on. Without having any real consideration that the return of Jesus is soon. Yes "it is near." "The coming of the Lord is at hand." In Revelation 22:7 Jesus Himself said: "And behold I am coming soon." In 22:10: "The time is near." In 22:12: "Behold, I am coming soon." And finally in 22:20b: "Yes I am coming soon."

Yes "stand firm in your heart, because the Lords coming, (his presence) has drawn near." It is "at hand so stand firm." "Because he who stands firm to the end will be saved." Friends surely this exhortation in some ways has never been more needed than it is today. Because faith and belief in the One true and living God and Creator of the universe, has been displaced by so many things in our modern world. Yes technology is going to save us all! Well while knowing that God is in control of all things, I believe that behind much of the growing technology today is the Evil One himself. All of this artificial intelligence stuff, is man playing God, but "God will not be mocked" the scriptures say. "I will not yield my glory to another" he says. So we "remain." We are long suffering in the face of trials, in a blasphemous, godless world! Finally v9: "Don't grumble against one another, brothers, or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door."

Brethren what James addresses now, is sadly the common outcome when people find themselves facing hardships together. If the enemy seems to be too powerful for us, or unattainable so to speak, we end up lashing out at those who are closest to us, even those whom we love, our nearest and dearest. The Greek word for "grumble" here is "stenadsete" and it is defined as giving vent to

querulous or censorious feelings. The original reads: "Murmur not brothers against one another." It's that speaking under your breath and behind a person's back kind of thing. Having a whinging whining spirit about everything that takes place.

Brothers and sisters, as I'm sure you are all aware, there is nothing worse than having this kind of person around. It's bad enough when we are going through difficulties together, but when someone can't see any good that's happening in anything, even God's strengthening and comfort in the midst of that trouble, it's infecting the body with a spirit of defeat. And that is not the Christian way Beloved! Because we have the victory in Jesus. He has gone to the cross. Sin has been paid for, and death has been defeated praise God. As the wonderful words in the song by the Christian group Casting Crowns, Glorious day goes: *'Living He loved me, dying He saved me, buried He carried my sins far away. Rising He justified, freed me forever, one day He's coming O glorious day. One day the trumpet will sound for His coming, one day the skies with His glory will shine. Yes glorious day!*

Friends we must live looking up. Anticipating our Lord's return! In chapter 4:11 James said: "Brothers do not slander one another." And here in v9 it's: "Don't murmur against one another." Don't allow your resentments, your petty jealousies and nitpicking to get a foothold amongst the Body of Christ. "Or you will be judged." As Manton explains, not only will those rich oppressors of v1-6, but those secret tools in the devil's hands also will be judged! And notice the final thing that James says in v9: "The judge is standing at the door." Which paints the two fold picture.

Firstly, those that have spearheaded the difficulties and hardships that the believers face in this world, well their "judgement is near," because the judge is about to enter the court, then all of creation will rise. Philippians 2:9-11. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" Amen!

And secondly, for the believer, "The Lord is at hand." So Beloved come what may, whatever depraved evil the world introduces we must stand firm because "the Lord is at hand, and He is coming soon." "And he that stands firm to the end will be saved" Amen. Yes *'living He loved me, dying He saved me, buried He carried my sins far away. Rising He justified, freed me forever, one day He's coming O glorious day. One day the trumpet will sound for His coming one day the skies with His glory will shine. O glorious day!*

Let's pray!