

JAMES

LIVING FAITH



Warning and Hope

James 5:1-12



Introduction

False confidence is the root of all sorts of errors and grievous mistakes. History is rife with stories of commanders and generals who led their forces into slaughter due to false confidence in their own capabilities or false confidence regarding the weaknesses of their enemies. False confidence is rooted in an incorrect understanding of both present reality and future results. James addressed dreadful false confidences in the first part of the passage we study here (James 5:1-6). He first addressed non-believing rich people who had an entirely incorrect understanding of their present reality (the judgment of God fully rested upon them and they couldn't see it), and they had an incorrect understanding of what their future would hold—they believed that they had laid up treasures that would cover for them “tomorrow.” But James said that all they had stored up were no match for the “misereries that are coming upon you” (v. 1).

On the other hand, true confidence for the believer can be found in having a correct understanding of the present and a steadfast hope in the future rule and reign of God. In the second part of our passage (James 5:7-12), James sought to encourage weary, oppressed believers with a reminder of the present work of God and the promised vindication they will receive from God in eternity.



Study

Context: James made the strongest statements that he would make in the whole letter as he began its conclusion. He was very likely addressing non-believing rich people who had the judgment of God presently and fully upon them (hence the reason these rich people he was addressing were likely non-believers), and he sought to give encouragement and exhortation to poor, oppressed believers who were suffering under their rich, non-believing oppressors.

APPLY → James clearly communicated that riches accumulated and trusted in will not defend the unrepentant sinner from the just judgment of God. The promised judgment of God upon non-believers is sobering to read. How can careful consideration of this passage provoke you to be more diligent in your praying for non-believers in your life and in your resolve to pursue them in evangelism?

APPLY → When we consider our responsibility in evangelism, we can sometimes unintentionally err in presenting the judgment of God as something to escape—as if we are giving a warning to escape from a murderous tyrant. This tone loses the appropriate perspective that the judgment of God upon all sinners is perfectly just and right. Why might you be uncomfortable in talking about the judgment of God with non-Christians? Why might you be uncomfortable in discussing the fact that the non-believer actually deserves this judgment of God? On the other side of the coin, how does the punishment for sin that Jesus endured give hope to the sinner who has been told that they sit under the judgment of God? (*You might want to glance over to the gospel connections section at the end of the study guide.*)

Comfort for the suffering believer (vv. 7-12)

4.) In vv. 7-8 James transitions from promising judgment upon non-believers to telling suffering believers to, “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord...Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” To the believer who is suffering under the unjust treatment of rich oppressors, how does the promised judgment of God give them comfort?

5.) James presents the rich non-believer as presently living in luxury and abusing those under them while their confidences of their future hope are dreadfully mistaken. He presents the poor believer as presently living under oppression and suffering, but their eternal hope is secure in the promises of God. What do these two dramatically different perspectives reveal about the distinctiveness of the Christian hope in this life and in eternity as opposed to the false hope of the world for this life and for eternity?

APPLY → Read vv. 7-12. How does the promise of future hope for the suffering believer relate to their responsibility to pursue godliness in this present life, even in suffering? Based on these verses, what are ways that your future hope ought to shape your present conduct?

6.) What are the illustrations James uses to highlight his points in v. 7 and vv. 10-11? How do these illustrations help to shed light on our responsibility to endure and be patient in the Christian life? How do these illustrations encourage you to patiently endure as you serve Christ?

APPLY → In vv. 9 and 12 James ties present faithfulness on the part of the suffering believer to being diligent in speech. There have been other instances in James' letter where he referenced the tongue (James 1:26; 3:1-12; 4:13-17) and the believer's responsibility in his or her speech. What are practical ways that you can pursue an attitude that is opposed to grumbling against one another (v. 9) and pursues honesty with those you converse with (v. 12)?

APPLY → Throughout this passage James referenced the coming judgment of the Lord upon sinners and the responsibility of Christians to pursue growth in godliness in light of the coming judgment of God. Both of these realities can be traced back to our understanding of God and his work. On his cross, Jesus endured the judgment of the Lord for all who look to Him in repentance and faith. By God's power, all who are Christians have the promise of God powerfully working in them in their sanctification. Read over this passage one more time. Consider and note how the gospel informs your hope in the face of judgment that was once fully facing you. And consider and note how the gospel informs your confidence in the exhortation to grow in godliness as a believer who has been rescued from judgment and given new life in Christ.



Connect

Gospel Connections. One thing that this passage makes abundantly clear is that God will fully and completely judge the sin of those who reject Him and trust in themselves. The hope of the Christian is not that God only cares to judge those who don't trust Him or believe in Him. In His perfect justice, God must judge *all* sinners—including those of us who are Christians. Our hope is not that we would not be judged and held accountable for our sin and the wrath that it deserves. Our hope is in the promise that Jesus Christ—God in the flesh—took the judgment and the wrath that we deserved, and he endured it on the cross. Our sin had to be addressed by God in His righteous judgment, and our sin was addressed and atoned for by Christ! The judgment and verdict was rendered, but Jesus Christ himself, the one who had no sin and deserved no punishment for sin, endured our sin on the cross.

Even in going to the cross to endure our punishment for sin, Jesus fulfilled James 5:5-6. He was arrested, convicted, mocked, beaten, and crucified by those who lived for the moment with no awareness of their sin (v. 5). They condemned and they murdered the perfectly righteous person, and He did not resist them (v. 6).

Whole-Bible Connections. James referenced Job as a model of endurance. Job was a man who endured great suffering in his life, and he certainly had his highs and his lows in regards to trust in God and confidence in His wisdom and will. In referencing Job (as well as mentioning the prophets of the Old Testament), James noted their steadfastness and patience (v. 10-11) and then in concluding v. 11 he referenced how the Lord was working out His purposes, and the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Many times in the Christian life we don't believe in the compassion, mercy, and wisdom of God when we are in times of hurt and pain. That is one reason the Bible is such a gift to us. We can join the suffering saints that James wrote his letter to, and we can all look back at the prophets and figures of old and see how the Lord cared for them as they walked through their trials and tragedies.

Theological Connections. God's coming judgment and vengeance upon sinners is a theme that unfolds throughout the Bible. In James 5:4, James wrote of the "cries of the harvesters" having reached the ears of the "Lord of hosts." The Lord of hosts describes God and His heavenly forces who will bring judgment upon the earth. This language was intended to warn the rich non-believers who would read this letter. The Lord and His heavenly host will bring full and final judgment upon the world one day. The judgment of God is coming. We do not know when, but we know that it's coming is sure. The judgment of God is right as it addresses the heinous offenses of man against a holy, righteous God.

Praise Connections.

MY SOUL LONGS FOR THE LORD

"My soul longs for The Lord in a weary land
Wells are dry and I am empty,
Only dust in my hands.
How I yearn for streams of mercy
Where my soul can be restored
'Come and drink' Jesus calls me,
'and you will thirst no more'
Oh the fullness of Christ
Word of God Word of life

Living Word you walked among us, our
Emmanuel
And you spoke into the darkness
Broke the powers of hell
Grace and mercy flowed from Calv'ry
To the valley of our need
It is done, 'It is finished',
From every sin set free
Oh the victory of Christ
Word of God, Word of life

How often in the stillness have I heard
your voice
Every whisper every promise calls my heart
to rejoice
In the quiet of the morning,
through the watches of the night

In the fire of my struggles,
There's courage for the fight
Oh the power of Christ
Word of God, Word of life

My soul longs to walk closer with The Lord I
serve
More than riches, more than favor
I delight in Your Word
Turn my gaze from all that's worthless
Set my heart on things above
May my life tell Your goodness
Your way of truth and love
Oh the wisdom of Christ
Word of God, word of life

My soul longs for the day I will see your face
Hear Your shout of jubilation,
No more tears, death or pain
Every word at last accomplished
Heaven sings and earth replies
To our God be the glory let all creation cry
Praise and honor to Christ
Word of God Word of life"

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