



James Series #10: Chapter 5:9-20
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9 Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.

11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

19 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,

20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

From the beginning of this letter, James seems to be focused upon the issue of the tongue. He moves away from it, but repeatedly he returns to the subject and he does so as he is coming to a close with this letter.

James was writing to people who appeared to be going through a time of persecution and trial. And as it is today, there were no doubt those who would try to make a run for it, and as always, some who failed to find their way back. He seemed to clearly know that while it is a strange aspect of human behavior, it was and is very common during those times of testing and distress for people to turn against the ones who love them the most and support them the greatest! Seriously, the goofiest response to testing is bitterness towards the people around us. But the fact remains that Christians are reluctant to assault God for their problems, so their bitter attitudes tend to erupt against others.

It is well beaten trail even around here with that crazy phenomena! I can always see it coming...people who are being testing outside of their own actions...just spiritual warfare, and of course those who are rebelling against God and authority in their lives. Often folks will turn to bite the hand that feeds them, and I have learned to keep my fingers out of their cage. Human nature 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 thing to see that your church is apparently responsible for demise in their marriages, their drug addiction, alcohol abuse, financial mis-management, gambling addictions, children's rebellion against their parents, and joblessness, etc etc! It is a curious twist of mankind that in times of pressure we build up wrath against those who have been there for us through thick and thin. But that's the handwork of the devil for ya...he aims to take 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 who is condemned: *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 out upon others in such situations! But rarely are they deterred. James makes sure we all know just who is actually the judge in all these matters...and he points out that 'said judge' is not far off and aloof, but rather he is "at the door." Meaning he can see it all and hear it all and be close enough to thump you on the head.

What James is really saying in this final passage is, "Set your house in order. Get it together before He comes, because He is going to get it together for you if you don't." Oh how sad it is to see grown men who love the salvation of Christ but can't seem to get even 'out of the gate' when it comes to the very real, practical and everyday exercise of their simple faith. I'm not trying to be intolerant and impatient gang...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 been no real progress?

After years of walking in Christ, do you have to be told yet to not have pre-marital sex? To not watch porn? To get a job? To not 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? Etc etc? This is what the writer of Hebrews is trying to say to us in chapter 6, verse 1: *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 people not to grumble and gossip about other people. Can you imagine? Yes...I would guess that you *can*.

10-11 *My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.*

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 that had gone on before them. We all do that. We stand in awe of the Spurgeons, the George Mullers, the D.L. Moody's and the Jim and Elizabeth Elliot's. But notice that suffering precedes patience. Thus imitating these folks is another matter altogether! We all wish we were those kind of people but many of us are still too much in love with ourselves and still too controlled by our flesh to ever live a faith life that would matter on the grand scale...or maybe even the local one.

And the worst part, is that we have not only somehow excused ourselves in this matter, but we have actually 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 have not had the school loans that I have incurred and I guess Muller had better work hours that I have." Seriously? Are we so brash as to minimize 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 men...to be faithful women. 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! We must make note that patience in scripture has more in it than merely waiting without losing your cool. It speaks rather of fortitude and steadfastness...enduring qualities that have an *positive* and *offensive* attribute in kingdom building not just a defensive pose as in gritting our teeth.

12 *"But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment."*

Wow. Wouldn't the world be a very different place if we just did that? If when you tell me you love me, that I could count on that? If when we said we are called to 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. And 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 now you are just left with a whole lot of questions. Questions that generally all dance around the one big one which is "...*how are we supposed to do all of this?*" Well, when we direct our displeasure and/or our personal manic at the church community or someone specifically in it, we are in trouble. Because by doing so it is only showing that your heart and mind are not right about just what a faith community, a pastor, 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?"

13- 16 *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*

It's clear that the community in which you are a part of is to participate in your spiritual journey and your seeking, but *they* are not the ultimate path nor the answer. They do not give you the respite nor the answer, nor can they therefore be blamed when God does not reply to you in the pre-determined way that you believe that 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 the righteous dude. But if you have to go looking for such a guy, maybe the answer would be rather for you to be a righteous dude yourself and then your 'fervent prayers' will 'avail much' too!*

17-18 *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*

Verse 16 told us that 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." And 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 determines that standing, not by some cosmic 'score card' someplace. 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" that James spoke of.*

For Elijah, one of the greatest aspects of what he was seeking was a glorification of the Father, not laying his hands on a new sports car or maybe a date with that cute girl down at the corner gas station. We are apt again to think because God says 'no' that He failed to answer. Often this is the catalyst for our 'exit' from the body of Christ. Such thinking only expresses our lack of understanding of just what prayer really is.

Prayer isn't tapping into a genie in a bottle where we get 'three wishes.' It is communiqué with the Lord of our life, and therefore is innately infused with "thy will be done Lord." This does not mean God does not 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 desire first and foremost that He would be glorified by His response? 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 finale, James leaves us with this:

19-20 *"My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins."*

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 we manage to pull the individual back into the community of God and he or she comes back to the feet of Jesus, we can be party to rescuing them from 'death.' What kind of death is this passage speaking of?

Well, we must consider firstly 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 rep 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 enjoy heaven forever. (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Secondly, we must consider that James is referring to those who "danced amongst us" but in fact never was truly converted. Sadly, such happens all the time 'round 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 at stake. James, I believe wasn't trying to be condemning. He was just trying... as he has throughout this very blunt letter, to be speak straight and call us to a path that is just as straight. No doubt, in hopes of "turning a sinner from the error of his way, *in hopes of saving a soul from death...*"