

Scripture Reading: James 4

13 "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good & does not do it, to him it is sin."

5:1 "1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. 4 Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. 7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 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."

The Riches of the Church

As promised, this morning we will continue our short series of messages for reformed churches from the Book of James by considering the riches of the Church. This is a continuation of our message from last week where we wrestled with whether we are willing to acknowledge God's authority: Here is where we have one of those chapter breaks it is best to ignore. Put another way, we are learning to demonstrate God's gift of faith by works of faith, and we must truly acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty by being willing to go where He leads us in our judgments, in our planning and now with our riches. James now reminds his readers again about the vanity of trusting in riches so we will NOT be tempted to put our trust or confidence in the rich and powerful of this world:

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This is a REAL temptation and James reminds us over and over again. Now of course it is proper to ask whether James is speaking of the brethren here or pointing to examples in the world?

Sadly, I think we must see it as both because far too often we have seen Saints succumb to such temptations and fall into the sins that James describes here in pretty stark terms. AND we must realize the special importance of these warning as we live in the midst of the richest nation in the history of the world. *[story of Russian/Romanian missionaries]*

So that can be our first application: Remember to pray in such a way remembering the warning from James! Jesus spoke about riches often during His ministry and gave a summary and similar warning in Matthew chapter six with regard to riches:

“19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in & steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

As I pointed out a few weeks ago, the question we must always be asking when it comes to wealth & possessions and yes, even relationships, IF we were to lose them overnight would it impact our relationship with Jesus?

- Wealth itself is NOT the problem, remembering that Job was greatly blessed before AND after his time of testing.

Jesus gave us two contrasting examples which instruct us about the proper and the wrong uses our accumulated wealth: Something we ALL have in the United States!

The first graphically illustrates the problem that James is addressing in our text:

Luke 12:16 “Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." [his 401k plan was safe & sound!] 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

- This is the sad end of ALL those who put their trust in riches!

But it is important to remember that this lesson must be understood in the light of the salvation of Zacchaeus in Luke 19... “8 Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; 10 for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

In our materialistic western world, a critical part of our faithful obedience as Christians, our submission to God’s authority, MUST be what Dr. Francis Schaeffer referred to as “the compassionate use of accumulated wealth.” This ties in very nicely with the focus we had on vocations during our Heildelfest celebration!

As with all areas of live God uses means when it comes to providing our needs... Men are to provide for their families and that goes beyond just having barely enough to eat: They should also provide an inheritance and be able to help the poor and needy.

- Next year we might see how home-making is also a vocation!

The bottom line is that God loves to bless His people, but they must always remember the warning He gave His people as they were about to enter the promised land:

Deuteronomy 6: “10 “So it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, 11 houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—

when you have eaten and are full— 12 then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. 13 You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.”

Please note that God did NOT tell them to tear down those cities and continue living in tents, or to burn the fields and vineyards so they could continue to eat manna...

- No, God wanted them to enjoy the fruit of that land of milk and honey, but they were always to remember where those blessings came from.

And before we return to our text I should say a word about the temptation to despair over what we see around us:

- Like that man with the abundance that required new barns!

The best example of this comes from Asaph who shared his concerns about the apparent prosperity of the wicked, in Psalm 73:

“Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

- An important lesson to remember because we can all be tempted in this area!

Asaph goes on to share what he thought of them “under the sun”... 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men...”

- Asaph goes on for another ten verses and concludes with this depar:

16 “When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—”

- Again he was looking around at the riches of the world and their arrogance forgetting Who is in control and the big picture!
- We are thankful he did NOT end at verse 16!

16 “When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me— 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. 18 Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. 19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”

- After entering the presence of God in the sanctuary, Asaph now sees things from God’s perspective!

And this leads to some repentance and the restoration of his confidence in God:

21 Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind. 22 I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. 23 Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. 24 You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. 26 My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, That I may declare all Your works.”

- This is why Psalm 73 should always be near the top of our favorite Psalms and why we need to take the warning of James here so seriously.

And finally, James comes back to the issue of proper Biblical patience that we saw in Chapter one... Trusting in the one in control!

James 5:7 “7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 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.”

- **We are all the players in God’s grand story and as his people we must learn to be patient and to look forward so we can better see all things from the Lord’s perspective**
 - **Like teaching young drivers how to make steady turns by looking further out**
 - **Or reminding people that we smile in the midst of trials and tribulations because we have read the end of the book!**

We must learn to be patient:

- **The example of Job reminds us that we do not always see the entire picture**
- **The example of farming reminds us that we are NOT in control.**
- **We must learn to have and keep our confidence in God!**

God is our true and ONLY Judge: He is our sole authority for all of life

You must strive to understand the Great Commission God has given to His Church and we must be ready to follow His commands and leading, not trusting in your own wisdom, power or riches.

We must always submit all of our judgments, our plans and our riches to the wisdom and guidance of God!

- ▶ **Then, and only then, you will demonstrate that same great faith that Jesus saw in that Roman Centurion so long ago!**

Communion Meditation: Proverbs 9

**“Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn out her seven pillars;
2 She has slaughtered her meat,
She has mixed her wine,
She has also [a]furnished her table.
3 She has sent out her maidens,
She cries out from the highest places of the city,
4 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”
As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 “Come, eat of my bread
And drink of the wine I have mixed.
6 Forsake foolishness and live,
And go in the way of understanding.**