

James 5B

- Today our study of James draws to a close
 - What a powerful letter it's been, and it's certainly worth a moment of review
 - Chapter 1 – Consider it joy when you face trials, because they are tests sent by the Father to allow us to demonstrate our spiritual maturity
 - Such a life-changing perspective...it caused us to reconsider the way we face trials, turning them to good
 - Chapter 2 – Don't show favoritism when faced with men of different social status
 - View our brothers and sisters as God does
 - And when we show favoritism, we violate the Royal Law
 - And when we pass these tests, we declare our faith – or prove it – by our works
 - Chapter 3 – Guarding our speech is a key to avoiding a life of disobedience
 - And we yield to the Spirit to control our tongue, counseled by God's word, and endeavoring to put into action what we learn
 - Chapter 4 – If instead we seek for the world's wisdom and riches, it leads to discord and rivalries in the church
 - We lie against the Gospel by acting like the world
 - And our prayers go unanswered because we are praying in selfish motives
 - James gives a warning to the self-sufficient, prideful Christian who won't respect God's sovereignty
 - Chapter 5 – James opened with a warning against the rich and unbelieving Jews who persecuted the church
 - And now he finishes with a series of exhortations on how to live until the Lord returns

- As I said, those chapters were one convicting message after another
 - And the conviction was so powerful because James drives headlong into many of the core issues of the Christian walk
 - We all struggle with a faithful walk, with improper speech, with a selfish prayer life, with favoritism, with seeking worldly goals, with an unwillingness to live out our faith in righteous works
 - So as we finish James today, let's give careful consideration to the way James wraps up his message
 - Because James must have known that his letter would leave his readers reeling from so many blows to their ego and pride
 - And though the hits were necessary and appropriate, James doesn't want to leave us without a word of encouragement as well
- Last week, James encouraged us to practice patience by keeping our mind focused on the return of the Lord
 - Don't be angry and don't take matters into our own hands
 - Remember I asked, if I told you the Lord was returning tomorrow, could you set aside your anger and desire for vengeance for just one day?
 - Patience is all about knowing that what we want is coming without our need to get involved

A small boy was looking at the red ripe tomatoes growing in a farmer's garden.

"I'll give you my two pennies for that tomato," said the boy to the farmer, pointing to a beautiful, large, ripe fruit hanging on the vine.

"No," said the farmer, "I get a dime for a tomato like that one."

The small boy pointed to a smaller green one, "Will you take two pennies for that one?"

"Yes," replied the farmer, "I'll give you that one for two cents."

"OK," said the small boy, sealing the deal by placing his coins in the farmer's hand, "I'll pick it up in about a week."

- From patience, James moved to reminding us of the prophets and the need for endurance
 - Let me say it another way...we are to prepare for whatever life brings knowing that it's all temporary

- And by our endurance, we please the Lord who will reward our patience in faith
- Now James finishes the letter with specific examples of how a patient Christian will live so as to demonstrate patience

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

- James says above all, a Christian should not swear an oath
 - Before we can understand James' concern here, we need to understand the specific action James is describing
 - He says we should not swear an oath either by heaven or by earth
 - He's speaking about making a promise or commitment and then giving an oath to assure a witness that we will keep our vow or word
 - James is not talking about the kinds of vows that are required by law, as in a courtroom
 - He's talking about voluntary vows we take upon ourselves to assure someone that they can trust us
 - Within the Jewish culture, any oath that mentioned God's name was considered to be binding and breaking the vow was punishable by law
 - But oaths sworn by other things, including other things in heaven or things on earth were not considered binding
 - Pharisees would take advantage of this self-made loophole to avoid obligations when it suited them
 - And it meant that their word couldn't be trusted because they might swear upon things that sounded binding but later were deemed to be otherwise
 - James says don't swear oaths at all, not by anything in heaven or earth
 - Don't bind your trustworthiness to someone or something else

- The first problem with vows is they should be unnecessary for a Christian
 - Consider what a vow means
 - It invokes the name of another entity as a judge or witness to your statement
 - It implies that a judge will be necessary to ensure we keep our word
 - Instead, James says if we want people to trust our word, just let our yes be yes and our no be no
 - Speak truth and keep your word, and you won't need vows or judges
 - Believers should be honorable in our promises and trustworthy in our speech
 - Making vows unnecessary
- Secondly, vows about the future are a form of impatience in waiting on God's plan
 - When we obligate ourselves to some future action by a binding vow, we are presuming to know God's plans for the future
 - And in our impatience to produce the future we prefer, some Christians may be tempted to make vows invoking God's name
 - This was particularly true in James' day
 - But James says. don't do this because you risk bringing judgment upon yourself
 - Because if you swear by God that you will do something in the future
 - But then God's plans for your life prevent you from keeping your vow
 - You are still obligated by your vow, and God will bring condemnation upon you for failing to keep the vow
 - Remember, if you choose to make a vow by invoking God's name, Scripture says that God will bring penalty upon you for failing to keep that vow

[Eccl. 5:4](#) When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow!

[Eccl. 5:5](#) It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.

[Eccl. 5:6](#) Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

- Because these vows are binding in God's view, Jesus gives the same warning as James in the Gospels

[Matt. 5:33](#) "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'

[Matt. 5:34](#) "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

[Matt. 5:35](#) or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.

[Matt. 5:36](#) "Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

[Matt. 5:37](#) "But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil.

- Both Jesus and James are saying the same thing
 - If you vow by God's name, you are gambling that the future will turn out as you expect
 - And in your impatience to know and predict the future, you risk being wrong
 - And if you're wrong, God will hold you accountable for your rash vow
 - That's why James warns in v.12 that we risk falling under judgment when we vow
- And now for those "Type A" Christians (like me) who prefer action over patient waiting, James now gives the proper Biblical way to act in a godly patient way

[James 5:13](#) Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

[James 5:14](#) Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

[James 5:15](#) and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

[James 5:16](#) Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- James asks, is there anyone among you who is suffering?
 - The Greek word for suffering means enduring hardship
 - James is asking is anyone enduring a difficult situation?
 - Who wouldn't answer that question "yes"?
 - James expects the reader to answer yes, and so here is his advice for how to respond to difficulties in a patient, godly way
 - We pray, which is the purest form of patience and waiting on the Lord
 - Because it is an appeal on God's strength and will and ability
 - And the act of praying necessarily requires we stop acting first
 - Can any of us honestly say that our first response to circumstances that make us angry or sad or scared or frustrated is to stop and pray?
 - But now can you see how patience and faithfully waiting on God requires prayer rather than taking matters into our own hands?
- On the other end of the spectrum, James asks if anyone is cheerful?
 - Here is the opposite side of impatience, and in our society it's at least as common as the first problem
 - When life is good and we're pleased with our circumstances, do we stop and consider the source of our joy?
 - Do we praise the Lord in our joy? Or do we congratulate ourselves and then make plans to increase our joy?
 - We have as much obligation to send up prayers of praise as we do prayers of petition
 - In both cases of joy and sorrow, our patience and dependence on God is best displayed in a patient prayer life that turns to God first and consistently, rather than last and sporadically

- Like the little girl who turned to God a little too late in her prayers...

It's bedtime, and a little girl is saying her prayers: "God bless Mommy and Daddy and me. And please make Madrid the capital of Australia."

Her mother, who is with her, asks why she wants Madrid to be the capital of Australia. The child responds, "Because that's what I put on my geography test!"

- James moves to perhaps the most common situation facing everyone sooner or later
 - He asks in v.14 if anyone is sick?
 - How does someone respond in godly patience to a sickness?
 - James says call the elders and have them pray over the sick and anoint the person asking for healing
 - And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick
 - And the Lord will raise up the sick person and forgive him for the sins he's committed
- This promise of Scripture is one many Christians have puzzled over, and many teachers have confused by their teaching
 - This is a specific kind of suffering that James is describing
 - And he's giving the proper way for a Christian to deal with this particular kind of suffering
 - First, let's examine the text carefully
 - We have the case of a sick person who needs healing
 - The sickness is an incapacitating sickness
 - The Greek word is *astheneo*, from which we get a similar word anesthesia
 - It literally means weakness
 - This person is weak and unable to get up
 - Secondly, the elders are summoned to pray

- The one who is sick must be the one to call the elders
- Third, the elders are to pray over this person
 - And anoint the person with oil
 - It's important to note that the elders are the ones to pray
 - We're not talking about the sick person praying
 - And the elders are to pray "in faith"
 - This phrase is similar to the instruction found elsewhere in Scripture to ask "in the name of the Lord"
 - The point is that the prayer is directed by the Spirit and is in accordance with God's will
 - The elders aren't praying with a belief in their ability to heal the person
 - They're praying with faith that it is already God's intention to provide the healing
 - If they don't share that faith, then they wouldn't participate in the prayer
- Fourth, the result of the prayer of faith will be the Lord raising up the person
 - The word for raise up is *egeiro*, which means to waken or bring to his senses
 - We're not talking about raising up in the sense of salvation or resurrection
 - We're talking about raising up in the sense of a physical cure strengthening the body
- Fifth, the sins of this sick person will be forgiven
 - Now why does James mention sins at all in this context?
 - What do sins have to do with the sickness or healing?
 - The answer comes from several clues
 - First, notice that the one who is sick must be the one to call for the prayer support

- It must be initiated by the sick person taking a step to appeal for help
- Then notice that the ones to be called are the elders, not men with gifts for healing or prayer
 - James wants men of authority in the church to attend to this issue
- Then notice in v.16 James summarizes his instruction by saying that confessing sins to one another and praying over one another is the condition for healing and forgiveness
- James links all these clues because he's talking about a healing taking place in a certain situation
 - The situation is when a Christian is under God's discipline for an unconfessed sin
 - The discipline has taken the form of physical sickness or weakness
 - And the sick person is suffering under judgment and discipline
 - But if they take the step of patiently relying on the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness, they can be healed physically
 - The elders are involved to provide the opportunity for confession and prayer
 - And the prayers of these righteous men can accomplish much good
 - And James wants those in the church who have been sinning and receiving God's penalty in their bodies to repent and be healed in this manner
 - This is similar to the situation that Paul described in the Corinthian church

1Cor. 11:27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

1Cor. 11:28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1Cor. 11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

[1Cor. 11:30](#) For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

- How often have these verses been misconstrued to suggest that if the sick person has enough faith, they will be healed from their illnesses?
 - Besides the obvious mistakes in interpretation in that viewpoint, it also defies common sense and logic
 - No one can be healed forever
 - If these verses were intended by James to mean that we can expect a guarantee of healing provided we have enough faith, then take it to its logical end
 - Can I live forever if I maintain a perfectly faithful prayer life?
 - Or if I die of disease, would that mean my faith ran out?
 - All of these conclusions are absurd, and therefore they reveal the ridiculousness of the entire suggestion
 - As we see in the text, James wasn't promising that faithful prayer will always heal our bodies from illness
 - He was promising that faithful confession of sins in the midst of praying elders will result in God's mercy and healing
 - And when we find ourselves in this situation, the keys to healing are repentance and confession
 - Until we are willing to confess our secret sins, we have no hope to receive God's mercy
 - And we're not talking about salvation prayers here... we're talking about sanctification issues
 - Secondly, we must be willing to confess to others our faults
 - Private sin requires private confession and public sin requires public confession
- James then offers a classic example of how this process works

[James 5:17](#) 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 earth for three years and six months.

[James 5:18](#) Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

- James uses Elijah as an example
 - And to make sure we are prepared to see the prophet as someone we can relate to, James reminds us that he was a man with our nature
 - He wasn't superman or super pious
 - He was like us
 - And following God's instructions, Elijah prayed and stopped rain in Israel for three and a half years
 - And when God was ready, Elijah prayed again and restored the rain
 - What do we learn from this example?
 - Firstly, what or who stopped and then started the rain?
 - God, of course
 - Not Elijah, it was God
 - Secondly, how were God's actions connected to Elijah?
 - God made clear to Elijah what He was prepared to do
 - And in both cases, Elijah sought for God's will to be done through his prayers
 - So in this way, Elijah's prayers given in faith were able to accomplish miraculous things
 - Because they were in accordance with God's will
 - Our prayers can be equally effective in ending sorrow and weakness when we are appealing to God's will and for restoration of those in sin
 - What a wonderful promise and privilege we have here
- Finally the end the letter, James writes

[James 5:19](#) My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, [James 5:20](#) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

- Since James had just been dealing with the situation of the brother suffering as a result of his sins, he finishes with a general call to restore our sinning brothers and sisters
 - If anyone strays from the truth, James begins
 - This is a verse worth thinking about for longer than we have time today
 - How do we get into situations where we're suffering under God's discipline?
 - Why do we become spiritually weak and in need of healing prayer?
 - Because we depart from the truth
 - Departing from the truth means walking away from what we know in Scripture
 - It means walking away from what we've learned from the Bible
 - Or just walking away from the Bible altogether
 - As we look around and see so many churches and believers departing from the truth, is it any mystery why so many are facing numerous sorrows and weaknesses?
 - Could we be witnessing the mass discipline of the Lord against many of His children in an age of disobedience?
 - Paul said it would happen
 - He called it a great apostasy and said it was one of the signs of the end times
- But James offers us a hope here as well
 - He says that when a brother or sister turns one of these disobedient Christians back to the truth, to the word of God
 - We save this person from death
 - In verse 20, the word for "soul" is *psuche*, which is commonly translated life
 - In Greek it means the sum of our earthly life

- In this context, it doesn't mean preserving salvation but rather the preserving of his physical life
 - The reality of Scripture is that continual sinning has the potential to bring an early physical death as God's judgment upon disobedient believers
- Turning these brothers and sisters back to the truth should be our goal in fellowship
 - To encourage each other to remain in the truth and dedicated to knowing and following it
 - And to the extent we're able to accomplish this task, we are covering a multitude of sins
 - This is the calling and purpose of this ministry