

Studies in James

James 4:13-17 & James 5:1-20

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Authored by: Mark Watson

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The Message

James 4: 13 - 17

Having laid down some fundamental guidelines concerning submission to God, James ends Chapter 4 by clearly warning us that we must realize that there is nothing in this life that we can count on apart from God. The warning also reminds us of the great importance of involving the Lord in all our plans. Do we sometimes exclude God when we are planning our lives? Are some of our hopes and dreams like “a mist, which for a little while appears, and then disappears” because they are founded outside of our relationship with the Lord? (James 4:14b).

It is so important to remember that God has a plan for our lives - not that we should be like automatons, without free will or thought; more like that we should live in full relationship with God as we were created to, and thus be set free to realize our potential and know who and what we really are in God through our Lord Jesus (Jeremiah 29: 11 - 14).

Although in this Chapter in which we are reading about ‘boasting about tomorrow’, in which “all such boasting” is declared as being “evil” (James 4:16), interestingly the Bible does not say that all boasting is wrong. Turn to Psalm 34:2, Jeremiah 9: 23 - 24, 1 Corinthians 1: 31, Psalm 44:8. We must understand the difference.

James 5: 1 - 20

In James 5: 1- 6, once again, James returns to one of his earlier themes and then expands upon it. We are presented with warnings about the special dangers of affluence, which can cocoon people in false security. Anything that takes our trust and focus away from the Lord is dangerous. It can warp our values and in a very subtle way cause us to lose sight of eternity. Do we want to cease to feel for those who are cold and hungry, for the lost and lonely, for the widow and the orphan? Do we want to lose sight of eternity?

James’ development of the theme of suffering continues in James 5: 7 - 12. We must take hold of the fact that we are to “be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming” (James 5: 7a). This is a patience that must be extended to believers as well as unbelievers.

James also tells us about “Job’s perseverance¹ (hypomonē)” - **NOT** patience² (makrothymía). Job was not patient (Job 3, Job 12: 1-3, Job 16: 1-3, Job 21: 4), but he persevered (Job 1: 20 -22, Job 2: 9 - 10, Job 13: 15).

The section concerning patience in suffering is completed by instruction against flippant use of God’s name or a sacred object to guarantee the truth of what is spoken - as Christians our “Yes” must “be yes”, and our “No” must be “no”, “or we will be condemned”. (James 5: 12)

¹ The Greek word for perseverance, ‘hypomonē’, describes a basic attitude of believers in view of the eschatological orientation of their faith. This means that over against a hostile world, we wait confidently for the fulfilment of the Kingdom and our own salvation. The word portrays a sense of expectancy and waiting, standing fast and persevering. ‘Hypomonē’ characterises true believers; it is an active concept that finally bears fruit, derived from faith and hope.

² The Greek word for patience, ‘makrothymía’, portrays a sense of long suffering and forbearance. God’s ‘makrothymía’ pledges Christians to a similar ‘makrothymía’ (1 Thessalonians 5: 12 - 24), which, as a Fruit of the Spirit controlled by love (Galatians 5: 22), issues in mutual correction. Love itself is forbearing (1 Corinthians 13: 4). Forbearance is a necessary quality in the service of God (2 Corinthians 6: 6), linking knowledge and kindness.

The last Chapter in James is brought to an end with a section concerning the prayer of faith. It begins by providing us with guidance - when we are in trouble we must pray, if we are happy we should sing songs of praise. James 5: 14 provides some of the basis for the practice adopted in our church of the elders praying for the sick.

James also recognises the value of fellowship in verse 16.

The Chapter ends by talking about those wandering from the truth subsequently being brought back. The wanderer is either a professing Christian, whose faith is not genuine (Hebrews 6: 4 - 8, 2 Peter 2: 20 - 21), or a sinning Christian, who needs to be restored.

Questions

1. Do you think God want us to have 'hopes and dreams', and what 'hopes and dreams' might we be encouraged to have? Are there any that we can share with one another?
2. We live in such an affluent society that we can not begin to comprehend the poverty that so many live in. How can we learn to live a life of closeness to God, being aware of our dependency on Him, that the poor and the needy seem already to have?
3. Do we understand what James means when he talks about patience and perseverance in our own walk with God? How can we increase in patience?