

Don't Grumble About One Another

James 5:7-9

Take your Bibles and turn to James 5. Let's begin by reading verses 1-9. We'll find our one another admonition in verse 9, but the context of the verses will help us understand the reason for this exhortation written by the half-brother of Jesus. James 5:1-9

As James writes, he has a very scathing rebuke for those who are both ungodly and wealthy. By ungodly I don't mean those who are Christians acting in an unchristian manner, but those who are not Christians. I want to put it out here right now that being rich is not a sin and neither is spending that wealth a sin. As a matter of fact we read in Proverbs 10:22 that "it is the blessing of the Lord that makes the rich."

And from I Timothy 6:17 we conclude that the rich can enjoy their wealth, but they are not to become conceited because of it or depend on it, but rather to depend on the Lord who gives all things for us to enjoy. "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

Money and possessions aren't the problem. Listen to what Paul writes "the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil. (I Timothy 6:10)"

A pastor noted "When people love money more than they love God, this is a problem. When people love money so much that they begin to behave badly and to inflict pain on others, then they have fallen over the precipice of wickedness and can plummet into all kinds of vile behaviors."

Throughout the Scriptures the Lord has consistently condemned the behaviors of the ungodly rich.

James's sharp rebuke of the wicked wealthy is in keeping with the tradition of Old Testament

prophets (Isaiah 3:14-15; 10:1-4; Amos 8:4-10)."

The Old Testament Law explicitly forbade the exploitation of the widow and the orphan. And Proverbs speaks of the woe brought on those who used differing weights to cheat others.

The rebuke given here in James 5 is for those who are wealthy and continue to hoard their wealth for their own personal pleasure at the expense of others without consideration of the needs. James is not promoting a socialist ideology so that there is equal distribution of goods to everyone.

James describes this hoarded wealth as wasteful. Jesus once said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. In the Bible Knowledge Commentary, Roy Zuck writes "Spiritual access is found in sharing, not hoarding, possessions."

James' rebuke against the wealthy hoarders has to do with their exploitation of others. He is condemning their abusive and manipulative conduct for personal gain at the expense and exploitation of others: things like slavery, sweat shops, human trafficking.

In verse 1 James condemns them for this kind of hoarding and abuse. He speaks about a future misery that will come on them as a result. Jesus said that where your treasure is there your heart is as well. A person's heart is clearly revealed based on his view of money and material possessions. Their heart was on the money they could make through the exploitation of others and they would be judged for it.

James then identifies three ways people tended to stock pile their wealth: grain, garments, gold. Notice what will happen to their riches. Their *grain* would rot. Think about the illustration that Jesus used to describe the fate of the rich man who amassed so much grain that he torn down his barns to build bigger ones in order to store all his

grain. Grain was used to barter with. If you needed the grain they had, you were at their mercy when it came to price. In the end they will lose it all.

Next, their *garments* would be eaten by moths. Clothes were a status symbol. The rich would weave gold thread into their garments a) as a place to store their wealth, and b) to flaunt their wealth.

Some of you will remember the music group Abba and their very faddish clothes they wore on stage. They admitted that the only reason they wore such outlandish outfits was to get around a Swedish law that meant clothes were tax deductible if you could prove they were not used for daily wear. So they saved a lot of money.

The third area they would see demise was that their *gold* would corrode. Now we state in a wedding ceremony at the exchange of rings that of the precious metals gold is most enduring and least tarnished. James is saying here that in the judgment to come all the gold and silver they amassed will be as worthless as a pile of rust. The word used here for rust doesn't just mean it's rusty but that it is completely rusted.

When I was in high school I would ride around on our motorcycle out in the national forest next to camp. Occasionally I would find an old camp site from many years earlier. Scattered under some tree I would find some rusted tin cans. It would be so rusted when I picked it up it would just crumble to pieces in my hand.

All that stuff they had accumulated at the expense and exclusion of others' needs would be worthless.
 Moldy grain
 Moth eaten rags
 Corroded coins

On the flip side though, James continues by noting that the cries of the workers who were exploited would be a shout of condemnation against them.

Their cries would be heard by God.

If you have ever felt taken advantage by someone then let this promise be yours to claim, let the hope of the Psalmist be your encouragement.

Psalm 34:7 "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles."

Jesus gave another illustration. It's found in Luke 16:19-31. He spoke of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus. The rich man is described as having clothes of purple and fine linen, clothes that were expensive: Armani suits and Testoni Dress shoes with a splash of Clive Christian #1 pure perfume priced at \$2300 a bottle.

He had everything he ever needed and wanted. There was nothing that was beyond his means. That is except for one thing – health. One day in spite of all his hoarded wealth and expensive possessions he did what everyone else will do – he died. Many of his friends probably thought it was a pity for such a fine man to die before his time.

The other character in Jesus' illustration was a beggar named Lazarus. He is the antithesis of the rich man. The sores that covered Lazarus probably covered more of him than his tattered rags. Thread bare and tattered there wasn't enough material to check the oil level on your dipstick. His odor from lack of hygiene and the ulcerating sores must have been nauseating to those around. He had nothing in respect to this world's goods, not even enough to buy him a piece of bread. Jesus said he was so destitute that Lazarus even longed just to get a few crumbs from the table of the rich man. His only companions in this life it seems were the dogs who came and licked his sores. Eventually he also died. Anyone who knew Lazarus probably thought his death came as a welcome relief from the misery he experienced in this world.

The rich man hoarded his wealth and ignored the

needs of the beggar. But when they both died Jesus describes their fate as something entirely different than those of His day would have believed. Wealth was considered a blessing from God while poverty was considered a curse from God because of some sin and that in the afterlife after death they would experience something similar to their experience on earth. Yet Jesus describes just the opposite. The roles are now reversed. All the needs of Lazarus were cared for while the rich man was experiencing utter and eternal poverty and misery.

Now that doesn't mean all wealthy people will be condemned to eternal hell while the poor will receive eternal bliss. Our destination has to do with faith in Christ. That's really what Jesus illustrates in His story.

I merely point out the story to illustrate what James writes that there will be a reckoning for those who exploit others. These wealthy people James is writing to will not fare well in the judgment. In today's vernacular they are fattening themselves up for the day of slaughter.

Years ago I helped a friend who raised pigs. He would fatten them up before taking them to market, never suspecting that the more they ate, the more they hoarded making them fatter served only to bring them to their eventual demise.

Now, that sets the stage so to speak in what James is going to write next and the need for this admonition. Let's read verses 7-9 again.

It is all too easy for us to look at those who are rich at the expense of exploiting others and wonder why God doesn't zap them for their manipulative and selfish behavior. We probably aren't all that different from the sons of Thunder who one day wanted to call down fire to consume a town for not welcoming Jesus.

James gives us some advice on how to react when it

appears that the unscrupulous wealthy are getting away with their abuse and corruption. What James says first is a word about waiting.

I. A WORD ABOUT WAITING – vs. 7-8

In verse 7 James shifts audiences. He moves from talking to the ungodly wealthy abusers to Christians who seem to be at the short end of this exploitation. What James is now going to write is a lesson for a Christian audience.

A. A Lesson for a Christian Audience – v. 7a

He calls them "Brothers". It's a word that refers to those who are Christians, those who have placed faith in Christ for salvation. But it is not just Christians in general He is writing to but to Jewish Christians who are scattered throughout the nations. We find that in 1:1. They certainly know a thing or two about persecution.

As we read these verses, there is a common thread that runs its way through them. It's an important truth to hold onto, a truth that we grasp by faith, a truth that awaits us at the end of our journey on this earth. No matter what our experience has been here from the poorest of the poor to having material goods, the believer will be a part of the coming of the Lord. That is the hope James wants his audience to hold on to. No matter how bad you have it, hang in there; the Lord is going to return. When we look around at all the injustice in the world that happens to others or even to us, think about the Lord's return. Keep that in the front of your grey matter.

James writes: "Brothers, be patient." It's a word that means to be long tempered. In a microwave world it's difficult to be patient. We want instant justice, quick action. Today's mantra is "ready, shoot, aim." We aren't happy with delay. We don't like it in the checkout line. We don't like it on the highway.

We don't like it at a restaurant.

We don't like it when the power goes out.

Instant oatmeal isn't fast enough.

Our culture perpetuates this mindset of instant gratification that can't wait for anything.

When something bad happens to someone brought on by someone else there are those who want to take justice into their own hands because the system takes too long.

But James advises patience.

There are two clear messages conveyed in this admonition from James.

The first is to look up because of the Lord's promise. The other day, David was having a bad day. We had said the day earlier that the next day we would go get some ice cream as an end of summer kind of treat and for a good start to the new school year. That was Labor Day and, well, we spent all day laboring and it was about 8 at night when we got done. David was upset because he thought we broke a promise.

Jesus made a promise that was abundantly clear to the disciples that He would return some day.

John 14:1-6

The angels reiterated it at His ascension.

Acts 1:10-11

Paul spoke of it.

I Thessalonians 4:13-18

I Corinthians 15:51-53

I John 3:2 "Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

In Jude 21 "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life."

Revelation 1:7 "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him..."

The Lord has made a promise and He will keep that promise. He who does not lie will not change His mind. The word used to describe that event means it is imminent, it will happen at any time, so when we are concerned about anything that may be happening right now, even to us, when the trials seem to be overwhelming, weighing us down, look up, consider the promise that Jesus made about His return and keep in mind that it is at any time. When life knocks us down it's easy to get discouraged even doubt. "Be patient, until the Lord's coming." There isn't anything else in Biblical history that needs to take place. It could be today. Be patient. Look up because of the Lord's promise. That's first. The second is to look up because of life's problems.

When the circumstances of life seem to be getting you down, look up. In the middle of a German concentration camp the sister of Corrie ten Boom said "there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."

We are told to look up because our redemption is drawing near.

The book of James is about practical faith in action and begins with a call to joyful living in spite of difficult life circumstances because it is through those very tests that our faith is built and strengthened.

James 1:2-4

James is telling us to allow those events to mold and shape our faith so that when other trials come they will help us to mature in Christ.

Let's face it. From our perspective life doesn't seem very fair. It seems like the ones who should get punished go free while the ones who could use a break get knocked down further. Be patient. It is

an important lesson for a Christian audience. In verse 8 we see a lesson from creation's agriculture.

B. A Lesson From Creation's Agriculture – v.7b

James pauses to give a clear illustration of patience. Of all the occupations he could have chosen from his day, farming was the best example of patience. "See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains."

They plant and they wait.

They can't hurry up the harvest.

The harvest is largely dependent on the weather, on the amount of rain needed.

We all know what a dry summer we had. I'm sure many farmers are going to feel it come harvest time. It's the same with weekend gardeners like Robyn. She plots and plants her garden each year. The front garden was watered more than the back. You can tell. The gourds and squash plants never really took off. They were stunted and it didn't help that the ground hogs ate some of the plants so that they couldn't grow. They never produced any flowers until about a week ago. By now we should be seeing mature squash and pumpkins. Last week I made the decision and told Robyn we shouldn't waste our time trying to weed that garden any more. I was going to pull up the plants and till it in. So on Labor Day I did just that. I left one plant that had one round thing I think will be a pumpkin. It probably won't do anything but I'll give it a go. All the rest though were pulled up. Was I impatient? Would we have gotten anything to eat from it?

The farmer knows to be patient during the different seasons of rain.

In Palestine the farmer plants his fields in what we consider the fall. The early rains fell in late October and early November. The heaviest rains arrive

between December and February. The lighter rains are at the end of April into early May. These rains are important for the maturing of the harvest. After the rains came the harvest. All farmers must submit to the process of planting and waiting.

Let's say Jim planted his crops on May 1st. Joann would get weary quickly if on May 2nd and every day after that for the whole month Jim came in complaining that there weren't any crops to harvest. Having farmed as long as he has, Jim knows there is a patient process of planting and waiting several months before harvest.

Agriculture provides an excellent example of the kind of patience that James is talking about. The farmer teaches us about the same kind of patience we are to have as we anticipate the Lord's return. That's why we see in verse 8 a lesson to carefully apply.

C. A Lesson to Carefully Apply – v. 8

Just like the farmer, the Christian is to be patient and here James adds to stand firm, to be strong, not waiver, to make fast or establish.

I Peter 5:10 "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

Ephesians 3:14-19

I Thessalonians 3:12-13

II Thessalonians 2:16-17

Again, James stresses the reason to hang on – it's because the Lord is coming; it could be at any time. In Revelation 22:20 Jesus said "Yes, I am coming soon."

So with a promise like that, what are you waiting for? In the middle of the trials that come at the hands of others are you able to stand strong and be patient? James gives a word about waiting. Then in verse 9 he gives a word of warning.

II. A WORD OF WARNING – v. 9

There is a command to heed.

There is a caution to heed.

There is a coming to heed.

A. There is a Command to Heed

Here is our one another passage.

Notice: “Don’t grumble against each other...”

In the KJV it’s “don’t grudge or murmur against one another.”

It’s an inward and unexpressed feeling of sorrow.

It literally means to sigh or to groan.

The word was used of Jesus as He sighed before the healing of the man who could not speak or hear.

Paul used it to speak of the groaning that creation is undergoing while it waits for the redemption of the world.

James uses it here to describe the inward muttering, complaining or being critical of the person who is taking advantage of us. They do something to us and we just let it seethe under the skin. We let it fester there for a long time. We keep it to ourselves and let it simmer inside.

A teacher once told her class to bring a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes to school. For every person they held a grudge against and refused to forgive they were to put a potato in the plastic bag. They were to write the person’s name on the potato along with the date. Then they were told to carry that plastic bag of potatoes with them everywhere they went: next to their bed when they slept, beside them in the car when they went somewhere, by their seat when they ate, next to their desk during class. Some bags were quite heavy to lug around. Over time the potatoes grew moldy and smelly. The lesson being that not holding a grudge is often the best gift we can give ourselves.

Stress from someone else can produce groaning

against the person who is giving us the stress.

The boss who makes us work late.

The spouse who is insensitive.

The teacher who lays on the homework.

The neighbor who blares his radio from the garage.

It’s anyone who causes us to groan or complain inwardly.

James says don’t grumble. It’s a command to heed.

Then there is a caution to heed.

B. There is a Caution to Heed

What’s wrong with a little grudge anyway?

Hebrews 12:15 gives us an answer.

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Holding such attitudes toward others is harmful to you and to them and to those around you. Feelings are hurt. Sides are taken. Relationships are torn apart. Our reactions to the wrong that has been done to us can be just as wrong as what was inflicted on us. James says that if we groan or complain about someone who has done us wrong then we too will be judged and just as guilty as those who treated us wrongly.

James says that the motivation for not judging others is so we won’t be judged.

There was an interesting article on the internet. The title was *How to Exploit People to Grow Yourself*.

It was an intriguing title so I began to read and found it didn’t have anything to do with using people in a negative sense of the word exploit. The intent of the article was to look at someone who was angry. Why were they angry? How did they respond when they were angry? What resulted from their anger? After considering what happened in that situation ask yourself whether or not you respond that way and if so make the necessary steps to change so that you have positive outcomes

instead of something negative.

Some might ask “why should I let it go? After all what they did really hurt me.” James gives a final piece of advice to help us see that it’s possible to let it go.

C. There is a Coming to Heed

Once more James reminds his audience that the Judge is coming, the one who will right all wrongs, the one who has honest scales and whose judgment is true and right. Jesus Christ the righteous is standing at the door implying that He is ready when the Father gives the call. He will reward or punish according to what the person deserves.

I Corinthians 4:5 “Therefore wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motes of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive His praise from God.”

We are not to take judgment into our own hands. Romans 12:19 reminds us that vengeance belongs to God.

We must be patient for the Judge to come and dole out what is appropriate on those who deserve His judgment. Trouble is temporary. Be patient.

Speaking to Christians, Paul reminds us in II Corinthians 5:10 that one day we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

To Timothy, Paul writes that it is Christ who will judge the living and the dead.

There is a day of judgement for the believer. But there is another day of judgment reserved for the unbeliever, a day when they will give account for their rejection of Christ.

We are to patiently wait because Christ, the Judge, is going to return. It will be a day when we will no longer need to groan inwardly because all the

injustices done to us will be made right and there will be no more crying or death or sorrow or pain. Until that time we are called to heed a command, heed a caution, and heed a coming.

The return of Christ should motivate us to godly living.

II Peter 3:14 “So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him.”

Loving one another as we should will help us not hold a grudge against others.

If you are going through a time right now where you feel you have or are being taken advantage of, be patient, look up, the Lord’s return is near. In that promise find hope and encouragement for the trials you face, because faith is built in the crucible of adversity.