



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

SOME FINAL WORDS! – JAMES 5:12-13

COLORADO

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The good end that God brought about in Job’s situation reveals that God is “full of compassion and mercies”. It doesn’t mean that endurance through suffering will always be rewarded through material prosperity. We know that’s not true. But James wants to encourage believers to be faithful, to persevere in suffering and affliction and patiently endure. And James reminds us of the blessing we receive from our merciful and compassionate God for faithfulness. Job gives testimony to that. May the flame of faith in our hearts never be extinguished by the affliction, opposition and testing of that faith. Your present suffering is not the end of your story. God will transform your situation for good when Christ returns.

SOME FINAL WORDS!-JAMES 5:12-13

James 5:12-13-“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; so that you may not fall under judgment. (13) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”

As James brings his practical letter to a close, he will continue to emphasize marks of a true and genuine faith that characterize the life of a believer. This study will focus on James 5:12 which deals with truthfulness in all our words and then James 5:13 begins a new section on prayer revealing how a faith that is real and genuine will turn to God no matter what the experiences in life may be.

I. HONEST WORDS -JAMES 5:12

James 5:12-“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; so that you may not fall under judgment.”

A. “BUT ABOVE ALL, MY BRETHREN...” – JAMES 5:12A

James will address the truthfulness of our speech in this verse as he transitions to an issue of personal integrity. “But above all” conveys the thought of utmost importance and shows that James is concerned about what he is about to say. It marks out what follows as a preeminent command to fellow believers whom he greatly loves. James does not want to see a lack of honesty condoned in their midst and desires to see them guard their speech and speak the truth.

B. “DO NOT SWEAR...” – JAMES 5:12B

James is not referring to vulgar speech in this verse

“do not swear” Greek *me omnyete* stopping an action one has already engaged in himself to a future course of conduct. An oath was to make an appeal to God or to something you hold sacred to support the truthfulness of a statement, promise or vow. And this practice was common with the Jews, used to support almost everything they said in daily relationships.¹

To better understand why James refers to this we must understand a little about the rabbinic traditions listed in the Mishnah which was additional Jewish interpretation of the Law of God. In the Mishnah, the Jews added much of their own ritual and practice as though it were from God Himself. A whole section was devoted to oaths. For example, if a Jew made an oath by the name of God it was binding, but if it was made “by heaven or earth”, it was exempt. If God was not mentioned directly in the oath, then you were not obligated to fulfill it. They would do this to appear to make an oath, when actually they would hide the truth in a pious action. Such a practice of pretending to appeal to God to establish the truth, while deftly framing an oath that they considered not binding was the worst form of worldliness.²

Jesus Himself dealt with this sin in the Sermon on the Mount, where oaths were used in order to give the appearance of making a binding agreement, but the actual wording of the oath contained an escape hatch whereby the speaker could not be held to what he had said. The oath was actually an assertion of truth used as a means of falsehood.³ (Matthew 5:34-37)

But what does that have to do with us you might ask? It would be like giving misleading information, promises to get ourselves out of a tight corner, “little” white lies for the greater good, intentionally misleading words or pledges. It would be like making a promise and then saying, “Oh but I had my fingers crossed.” James is demanding that this sinful practice be stopped because it is lying. James insists that our truthfulness be so consistent and dependable that we never need an oath to support our word.

C. “LET YOUR YES BE YES AND YOUR NO, NO;” – JAMES 5:12C

James uses the present imperative to mark the believers’ unwavering duty. He calls us to be so transparently honest that no further confirmation by oath is needed because our “yes” does in fact mean affirmatively “yes”! And no oath is needed to confirm a “no” either. Having to add an oath to your statement only confirms the weakness of your very words, suggesting your word is unreliable.

D. “SO THAT YOU MAY NOT FALL UNDER JUDGMENT.”- JAMES 5:12D

No matter what you think, God regards your word as binding. It is a very serious matter not to uphold the truth with your speech. It is a matter of integrity and godly character to practice a devotion to truth with our lips. We live in a world of lies and dishonesty. That should not be a surprise since the father of lies is Satan. (John 8:44) James is a very practical book. So heed the imperative counsel given for we must all be careful. We must be known as people who keep our word. (Ephesians 4:25) Speaking truth will always cause believers to shine faith in the darkness of a world of lies.⁴

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS, GOVERNOR & SPOUSES: TUESDAY AT 7:15AM, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0109

STAFF, LOBBYISTS, JOURNALISTS & SERGEANTS: TUESDAYS AT NOON, CAPITOL BASEMENT, ROOM 0109

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II. PRAYER! -JAMES 5:13

James 5:13-“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”

James 5:13-18 transitions to a new section emphasizing that the life dominated by a living faith will turn to God in prayer no matter what the circumstances, whether good or bad. Throughout this book, we have learned that life’s trials are not an unnatural barrier to our walk with God, but are the appointed way forward to spiritual maturity. And the way forward in situations demanding endurance is the way of prayer.⁵ Every verse in James 5:13-18 calls the believer to prayer.

A. “IS ANY AMONG YOU SUFFERING?” – JAMES 5:13A

The word for “*suffering*” here is the verb form of the same word used in James 5:10 which you will remember refers to evil treatment from people. James was not referring to trials and testing from physical disease, rather he is addressing those who are persecuted and treated in an evil way. James is focused on the weary, weak and suffering believer who can’t take another step. The word “*suffering*” refers not just to the distressing situation so much as the spiritual burden it brings with it.⁶ Knowing the answer, James, with great care and compassion, asked the rhetorical question “*Is any among you suffering?*”

B. “LET HIM PRAY.” – JAMES 5:13B

What is essential for enduring suffering and affliction? Turning to God Who is our true source of comfort in prayer. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, 1 Peter 5:7) When life is difficult, when we are weak in faith, weary with persecution and crushed with affliction, we must continually plead with God for comfort and strength.

“*Let him pray*” in the Greek is an imperative, present tense, singular verb. Imperative stresses the command to make it a practice. Present tense emphasizes the constant, continual, daily pleading with God in prayer that must take place on the believers’ part. And since this is a singular verb, we are reminded that this is an individual matter. Of course corporate prayer is essential in the body of Christ. But God calls each of us to come before Him personally as well. James calls each believer to constantly turn to God for wisdom, refuge and strength as a regular part of life. Trouble should drive us to our knees before our heavenly Father in every situation. And though the situation may not change, our hearts can be encouraged and strengthened and our focus redirected on the Lord.

To pray continually is a frequent call in Scripture. Romans 15:30-32, Ephesians 6:18-20, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, Hebrews 13:18-19 to name a few. A strong commitment to prayer is a must when it comes to enduring affliction and suffering. James reminds those who are suffering that God is available and desires for us to turn to Him in prayer.

How do you respond when you are suffering? Is it God you turn to first? James’ answer is simple and complete...*pray!* You must keep

on going to God every day. And He will give you what you need to endure!

C. “IS ANYONE CHEERFUL?” – JAMES 5:13C

At first it seems James switched gears by asking the question “*Is anyone cheerful?*” The word for “*cheerful*” in the Greek refers to being of good courage, in good spirits and is dealing with a state of emotions that has nothing to do with outward circumstance like trouble and suffering does. It means to be in good heart, not necessarily trouble free. It refers to the state of the heart no matter what the circumstances are. Again, James asks the rhetorical question “*Is anyone cheerful?*”

D. “LET HIM SING PRAISES.”- JAMES 5:13D

Sometimes a reminder to turn to God is needed even more when things are cheerful then when they are hard. And that joy should direct our heart in an expression of praise to God. Giving praise to God, like our petitions for sustenance in times of trouble should be a regular part of our lifestyle.⁷

What is the point here in James? The suffering and the cheerful, the hurting, broken spirits and the happy, rejoicing ones are both called to pray. One is to plead for strength and the other is to praise and thank God...another form of prayer itself!

Prayer helps us remember and acknowledge the sufficiency and sovereignty of God and enables us to accept God’s will and see it for good. James covers it all from troubled times to cheerful ones and everything in between, James directs us to go to God. Whether you find yourself in the gloomy valley or the joyful mountaintop, go to God.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ encompasses every experience in life and as we turn to Him in prayer we find we have a God big enough for it all. In times of trouble and suffering, joy or sorrow, prayer and praise alike, acknowledge that God is sufficient. To pray is to acknowledge His sovereign power to meet our needs. To praise is to acknowledge God’s sovereign power in appointing our circumstances. God is our sufficiency!⁸

¹Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 284.

²Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 284.

³Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.184.

⁴MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on James*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.271.

⁵Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.186.

⁶Hiebert, D. Edmond, *James*. Moody Bible Institute: Chicago, Illinois, 1992. Pg. 293.

⁷Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter of James*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000. Pg.236.

⁸Motyer, J.A., *The Message of James*. InterVarsity: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985. Pg.188.