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## JAMES 5:1-6

[PRAYER] Lord, It's something that you've instituted, a man and a woman to come together to share a life together, raise a family. We're grateful that you've done that and you've called Tim and Margie to be together. So we ask that you would be the center of their marriage for their whole relationship, their whole life; that you would grow them and knit them together. Especially we ask that you'd give them a wonderful time together over these next few days as they just relax and enjoy life. Give them great times with you and great times together with each other. Pray your blessing upon them. Keep them safe. And now, Father, give us insights into your word. Come, Holy Spirit, and be a part of this place. Come and teach us afresh. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Well when I teach I've been working through the book of James. So you don't get to hear it too often. I preach four or five times a year, sometimes when Scott's away, sometimes when he's here. I work through the book of James. The last time I preached I went back to the first chapter again. I went back to the very first chapter and it was part of a series that Pastor Scott and I did together about joy. Because that first part of James is about considering it pure joy. One of the first things he says is *consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds*. That is a striking passage. I spent pretty much the whole passage talking about some of my life struggles and my challenges in doing that.

We're going to move onto chapter 5 now. But before we do, I just want to review something that Pastor Scott did a few weeks ago. I thought it was extremely helpful. He talked about how he comes to the scripture and how he prepares his sermons, how he prepares to teach. He talked about the first thing he does is he reads the text, observes what's there. And secondly he interprets the meaning of the passage and the intent of the author to the original audience. I think that is really crucial. We forget this sometimes. We want to know what was the purpose, in this case of James, what was he trying to communicate to the Christians that he was writing to at that time. We can jump really quickly to thinking what it applies to us. But if we miss that, we miss this original intent, it's very important in this passage. You'll see why.

Then out of that we can pull the internal truths. What are the lasting truths that we can grab onto, internal truths that we can then say, "God, how does this apply to my life?" So that is what we're going to do today.

This led me to a review kind of about the whole book of James. I wanted to just look at the whole book again and say what is his intent. What is the intent of James? So bear with me. We'll just review this again. It will be helpful for all of us, I think.

He starts again with this idea of considering it pure joy. Not just joy, but pure joy. Pure joy when you face trials. Immediately that's a difficult concept to embrace. Isn't it? How can we consider it pure joy when we're facing trials?

Well let's think about the people that he was talking to again. James was talking to the Christians who had been scattered by the persecution of the Jews. They had been hunted, chased down. They had to flee Jerusalem, flee to wherever they could go. They left their possessions. They left their homes. They were poor. They were hiding out. All kinds of things. They were facing trials of all kinds. All kinds of trials. Losing a lot of things and maybe losing a lot of friends in this persecution. They were losing a lot. James is trying to get his readers, his audience to look beyond circumstances.

We get very fixated on our circumstances, don't we. I know I do. I talked in my last message about my struggles with anxiety and depression. It's very real. When you get in that mindset, things are wrong. When things are physically wrong or difficult... I'm talking to a couple people who are dealing with physical challenges. When we face physical challenges, it's easy to get all wrapped up in us. Isn't it? What's happening seems to consume us.

Well I'm sure James knew that was the case with this audience as well. They were probably getting fixated on their challenges. "Whoa is me. Why is God letting this happen to me? What's going on?" He wants them to get off of that. He wants them to fix their eyes someplace else. He wants them to fix their eyes on what he says at the end of that section. That He is working all good things. He's developing maturity in them so that they will receive the crown of life and be lacking in nothing.

You know it's great to say those words, but to actually believe them deep down for them to be the truth of the core of our being, the thing that our faith rests on it's not easy. You know what I mean. Because Satan likes to get us fixated on those circumstances. So this is one of the big things that James is doing. We're going to come back to this again. One of the big things that James is doing in this whole book is helping us get our minds and eyes off of circumstances and trust Jesus. It's a very practical book. God works everything together. He doesn't want us to fixate on the problem. He wants us to fix our eyes on Him, Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

He continues now. He applies that in some very practical ways. He starts talking about the tongue and how we speak. He starts talking about how we treat one another. He talks about a lot of different things.

One of his other big themes is faith and works. Listen in chapter 2 what he says. *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*

*Faith without deeds is useless.* So we often get caught up in is it faith or is it works. Is he promoting works? He's not really promoting works, but he's saying that if you really have faith in God, it's going to work itself out in your life in the way that you treat people and the way that

you deal with your business, and the way that you handle your finances. It's going to work itself out. So you really can't. If the fruit of your life doesn't manifest the goodness of God, the truth of God, the love of God, then to say, "I have faith," is really foolish. It's just not true.

Now he continues to apply this theme to every subject. We're not going to go through every one. But his other theme is that faith without deeds is not real faith. Faith without deeds, if it's not impacting the way that you live, it's not real, it's not genuine. Something's wrong. We need to examine our hearts and why that's the case. He's very specific and practical.

Now that brings us to our passage for this morning. It's a tough message. I've been wrestling with this for a couple of months of how exactly to teach on this particular passage. You know sometimes you wait on the Lord, don't you? You wait on the Lord. "When am I going to get this, Lord? When am I going to get clarity? When am I going to understand?" And I got it over the last couple of days. I felt like the Lord said this is the way to go. So here's where we're going to go.

We're going to continue in this tradition in standing in reverence of God's word. I am not going to put it up on the screen. I am going to ask you to stand. You're going to listen to this passage of scripture. I'm just going to ask you to close your eyes and just listen. Because this is a passage you really need to feel, I think.

*Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.*

*Again, now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. You may be seated.*

So the challenge of this particular passage of James for me is it seems so different from the rest of the book. James addresses folks, brothers and sisters, and he's sharing with them. All of a sudden he takes this other tone. *Now. Now. Listen. You rich people.* Who is he talking to? That's the question. I did quite a bit of study on this. And it's actually not clear. Nobody really is clear on who is being spoken to. But it does make a difference on how we draw our conclusions. So I'm going to share just a few things with you about who I think James is talking to.

Just remember James is writing to persecuted and scattered believers. They've lost lots of things. They've lost their homes, maybe their possessions, maybe their friends and family. And he talks earlier in the letter about the poor. The poor may be being poor in material wealth but being rich in spiritual treasures, if we have the Lord. Rich in spiritual treasures. He addresses those folks as brothers and sisters throughout most of the letter. Now he's taking this different one so it would seem. I'm convinced that he was not addressing believers at this point. He was saying this for the benefit of believers. We'll get into that. He was communicating. But in case someone did see this

wording, he wanted them to know how he views people who are overly rich, self-indulgent. The pretty drastic change of tone and focus.

Scattered Christians weren't rich. They weren't rich. They were poor. In fact they were the ones who were being mistreated, who weren't being paid their wages. They were suffering because of the self-indulgent rich people. It's a pretty strong statement about rich people.

Well so who are rich people? Maybe that's a question that's on your mind as it was on mine. What point do you become one of these rich people? Well he's talking about people who are so consumed with gaining wealth, so indulging themselves, so self-focused that there's nothing else that's important. Gaining for themselves. We can think of people. Maybe your mind is going to people that are like that out in the world that you know or celebrities that you know. There are a lot of people like that.

In the time of his writing (remember we want to understand what James was trying to say in the time of his writing) there are basically three things that made a person rich. The first was having the land and being able to grow things and thus have valuable produce, things people could eat, wealth, corn, things people could use in their daily lives. We don't consider farmers rich, probably, as much today. Those just own land to plow it and grow crops. But in that day it was very significant.

The other thing is fine clothing. You were rich if you could dress well. And that's probably the case today still. And gold and silver. If you had those things of value. Today for us it's different things. Maybe it's investments, maybe it's property, maybe it's gold and silver, other things. The key is that these things and the people he was talking to, they had other people that would come into their fields and help sew, help plant, water, help harvest the fields. And these folks were treating them like dirt, treating them very badly. They had so much money. They cared so much about their money that they could play with it. They were consumed by trappings and expensive toys. Wealth is their god.

I don't know about you, but with so much poverty in this world today, that concept is just disgusting. Have you ever watched one of these shows about the rich and famous? *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. A couple of other ones. One time I watched just to see. You know, I really couldn't finish watching it. It was disgusting to me how much some people have. Some who have not even earned it; they inherited it. Others have earned it. But they have so much and the things they create, the opulent homes, the possessions that they gather, the cars, the boats. Have you ever seen any pictures of these yachts that millionaires and billionaires own? Wow. Amazing.

Listen to these verses. This is the way James feels about folks whose wealth is their god. *Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.*

James is not really condemning wealth as such. In the Old Testament we see a lot of people, godly people who had a lot of wealth. In the book of Job, Job was a man who had a lot of wealth. Now God gave him a difficult trial to go through. But he didn't condemn him for having wealth. So having riches is not necessarily in itself a bad thing. How do we view that? Is it our god? Are we self-indulgent and greedy?

So what were these rich people doing? *Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.*

Well we're back to faith and deeds again. The deeds of these rich people were revealing their heart, their lack of faith in God, their lack of humility. Wealth had become their god. They were willing to do almost anything to maximize their wealth, act unjustly, do evil things. James is teaching us about this approach in life. What does it have to do with us? What is the lasting principle? What's the principle? I think there are a couple of them here.

In other words, so why is James even telling the Christians that he's writing to, the persecuted, the suffering, the poor. Why is he even telling them this? Why? Just ponder that a minute. That's a question I've been wrestling with. So why did James do this? Why did he go in this direction? I think there are two things.

One – I think he wants us all, even if we're not wealthy in these kinds of standard. We're wealthy in many ways. The fact that we're here. We drove a car here, we have a place to live. We have things. We're blessed in many ways. We have education. We have training. Various things that we've been able to receive. We have family. We're blessed. We can all be subject to being self-indulgent.

I talk to a lot of parents and young people, and our society is a very self-indulgent society. I call it the on-demand society. Because everything is on-demand, our media, our cell phone. If you don't know something, you just ask or google and you can get anything you want at any time. It causes us to think what we need is the most important thing that there is and we can become self-indulgent.

So he's warning us all, I believe, and all of those who are ready about the dangers of self-indulgence. Things are not going to last. People are going to last. Souls are going to last. The things that we do for others, the relationships that we have, those things are going to last.

So just a warning for all of us about avoiding the cultural push in our lives that we see all the time. I don't like watching commercials. I don't like that. Sometimes they're fun. Super Bowl commercials are a little bit of a fun thing. But you know, commercials are starting to drive me crazy because it ends to make me want stuff. I see the newest gadget that's being promoted or something that I want. It starts to make me self-indulgent. I start thinking about what I want, what I need, what I want, what I need, what I want. It gets me focused on myself. So avoid. We need to avoid self-indulgence.

So again, why is James writing about the excessively rich to the poor and scattered Christians of his day? He wants to warn them about being self-indulgent, but I think that's not the main thing. I think we're harkening back to chapter 1 again. *Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.* I think he's focusing on their attitude.

Picture yourself in that situation. Now for many of those Christians they had witnessed the stoning of Stephen, someone that was a leader in the young church, very much respected, and he had been stoned and killed. Others of their friends and family had been killed. They had fled to not be in that count. They had fled, left everything. Might you be tempted to be a little mad, a little angry, a little resentful? Might you even want to take revenge? I imagine he was thinking those things. He wanted them to realize that we don't want to focus on the circumstances. We want to focus on the internal truth that God is good. So here, again, whatever trial we're facing (and these folks were facing trials), we need to be aware that God is good.

So there's a couple of possible responses. When we're facing trials. These folks could have been very discouraged. They could have been jealous of those who had so much more. Angry. Resentful. Thinking maybe of even seeking revenge. He knew this was a temptation. Or they could in that situation be patient. And in the next passage (I decided not to go into this today), but in the next section he's going to talk to them about being patient in the midst of these trials.

So what's the internal lasting principle? Not to focus on our circumstances, but to trust in God's goodness. God is working. God is doing things in the midst of even some of the most evil things. Not our place to take revenge. There are people doing some horrible things in our world today. We can think it's our place to take vengeance into our own hands. That's not what God calls us to do. What does God call us to do? So what are we to do today? Well first of all, we don't want to fall into this trap of being jealous of those who are rich or just seeking vengeance on them. He's being encouraged to remember that God is the judge and he's painted a picture, hasn't he? Weep and wail. The rich people have a lot now. Their reward is what they have, but it is going to be gone. It is not always going to be there. It is going to be gone. All these riches are going to fade away and they're going to be left with what's the condition of their heart, the condition of their soul. That's all their going to be left with. And there's going to be weeping and wailing.

I don't know whether you've heard much weeping and wailing. We don't see a lot of wailing. We see weeping. We don't see a lot of wailing. But wailing is a pretty loud and difficult thing. When people wail, they are hollering, they're moaning. It's just painful. There's pain. It usually happens at a funeral, weeping and wailing.

God is the judge. It's His job to take care of this. Now that doesn't mean that God doesn't call us to take action on behalf of oppressed and poor people. There are lots of ministries and a number of you are involved with them. A number of you went on a mission trip down to Brazil. There is Hope Unlimited, working with street kids, homeless kids. There are people that are taking action. There is the Restoring Hearts Ministry of Trenton, dealing with the homeless situation, trying to make a difference in the life of the homeless. Some of you support children, the poor around the world through World Vision or some other organization. There are things that God does call us to do in the midst of this suffering of the world. He calls us to be involved and to help. And He

calls us at times to challenge those who are rich. God may work in us in that. But vengeance or revolution is not what He's calling us to do in this situation.

Finally there's a warning for all of us of the wages of a self-indulgent lifestyle that James is describing. We may not be super rich, but we're tempted in some way to be over indulgent. My challenge...I shared with you last time a good bit, so I'm not going to share that again. But I'm learning as I understand more what the media does, what the world does to us. It gives us these messages, bombards us with these messages. Which is why commercials are hard. Bombarded with these materialistic messages. We get bombarded and even not knowing it sometimes we take on, we believe lies.

There's different lies that we believe and I find that today I realize that I believe that I compare myself. I have comparisonitis. I compare myself with those that are better off than I am. I seek the approval of other people. I want them to like me. So I think I have to be perfect. Social media doesn't help me. I spend a lot of time on social media. It's part of my job. Boy, it's a love-hate relationship because what we see on social media has been described as a highlight reel. It's everybody's best foot forward. It's all the great things that are happening. It's all the weddings and the birthdays and the fun outings on the beach. And that's all good. But because I seek the approval of others, because I think that my worth has to be tied into what other people are going to think of me, I can get caught up in that, and I have these false beliefs.

My counselor calls them automatic thoughts. My fallback. Deep down inside I fall back. It's partly because of some things I didn't receive early in my childhood. But I have to combat that with the truth. The truth is that my only identity really is in Christ. That is my identity in Christ. And the truth is that He died for me. He's forgiven me. I'm acceptable in His eyes. I don't need your approval of others. I don't need to be like any other people. I don't need to have possessions to be valued. I don't need to have an education to be valuable to God. I'm valuable to Him.

I'm an Eagles football fan. I know some of you are Giants fans. Sorry about that. But I really admire some of the Eagles players who are Christians and who are outspoken. Carson Wentz, one of the quarterbacks. Nick Foles, the other quarterback. Carson Wentz has this foundation called the Audience of 1 Foundation. I just love that concept of audience of one. The idea of I'm performing not for all these millions of people that are watching me play this sport, but I'm performing for Jesus. That's all that really matters. I want to be like that. I want to not care about what other people think. I want to not seek vengeance on people, not just to have to get approval of other people, not be over indulgent on me, and trust God to take care of me.

So we want to take Jesus home. How do we take Jesus home? God's speaking to each of you in a different way. Let's just take a moment and be silent, be quiet and reflect on that. What is God saying to you this morning? What is He saying to you? Something about a way that you are over indulgent? Something about maybe how you tend to feel about those who are better off than you and wanting to be like them? Some other action that God is calling you to take? Let's go away from here with something that God wants us to do. Let's be silent.

[PRAYER] Lord, thank you that your Holy Spirit is with us this morning. Even as we continue to reflect and some of us talk about this at other times during the week, during our small groups,

help us understand how this applies to us, what you're saying to us. We believe this letter was written to the Christians in the early church. But these principles of not trusting in things and wealth to find our identity or the approval of others, but having you be the one that we care about, an audience of one. Help us all in that each day this week to be seeking to please you and to trust you, to live for you. It's in Jesus' name that we pray, amen.