

FAITH IN ACTION

Part 5 - Faith, Possessions and Prayer

Planning and Possessions

James 4:13-17

Ouch. Whoops. Uh-oh... If it's not what God wants, it's arrogance to pursue it. It's sin.

James wants us to know – we don't know!!! And so we need to be humble enough to wait on the Lord.

“Trust in the Lord and lean not on your own understanding”

PROVERBS 3:5

James 5:1-6

James is trying to make us uncomfortable. This is an issue, and he wants to address it.

Are we rich? I'm sure you know the statistics...

Accounting for inflation – if you earn \$150 a day (which is \$19/hr for a full-time worker – \$39k a year) – you're close to the top 1% of people in the world... Definitely in the top 5-10% globally.

Maybe James is talking to us? Maybe, in our obsessions with earning, planning, preparing, rostering God into 2 hours a week (maybe 4 if we're super holy and go to two services and life group?) and not putting Him first, this might be for us?

James expands on Jesus's words in Matthew 6, in the sermon on the mount.

It's not just that you can't take it with you when you go – James wants us to know that it will take us down if it's what we focus our life on. And by down – he means down... flames, fire, brimstone – you know... Hell...

James' language is reminiscent of the rich fool in the place of torment in Luke 12:13-21.

James uses intense and provocative language to draw the wealthy to a single point, I believe: If you put your focus on anything other than Jesus – including your wealth – you are fattening yourself for the slaughter, you have not noticed the times you are living in. And you are proud. Humility is the only solution.

Preparing for the Promise

James links this issue to what he says next...

James 5:7-11

The Lord is coming!

Myths and so on: see 2 Peter 1:16, 1 Timothy 1:4 and 4:7, and Colossians 2:8.

Remember: God is compassionate and merciful! It's the bookend to Chapter 1:16-17:

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

JAMES 1:16-17 (ESV)

James 5:12

We don't need external verification of our integrity when we are always living it out...

FAITH-FILLED PRAYER

James 5:13-18 (ESV)

Suffering? External things getting you down? Prayer is your solution!

Cheerful? Internal state actually pretty good in spite of all of the stuff going on around you? Praise!

Sick? Let's pray!

There's the wonderful double meanings here that come all the way through the scripture

'Save' the person – sozo – physical, emotional, spiritual healing, maintain, preserve.

'Raise' them up – literally from their sick bed, and also figurative of the spiritual life.

Don't fall for the 'it's only one or the other' – sickness or spiritual salvation, that's not a divide that they would have even entertained.

God cares for us – body, mind and spirit – and He works his healing and saving power through the prayer of faith

James is constantly encouraging us to be open, authentic, humble and faith-filled in our dealings with each other.

That's how this thing works – we take the faith, the grace, the gift apportioned to us, we use it in faith for God's purposes, and it awakens faith in those around us! Plus, people get healed and saved!

Why? Not because we are full of our own power or worth or anything! Because HE is powerful, and in obedience and humility, we get to be the donkey He rides in on, the coin in his pocket, spent on whatever He so desires.

“Choose this day who you will serve...”

JOSHUA 24:15B (ESV)

Questions to Discuss

1. What role does your relationship with God mean in how you plan and conduct your life?
2. How do you see your own personal wealth? Is it a gift from God, or your own entitlement because you worked for it? Does it all come from God?
3. How do you steward your wealth as a result?
4. Sin is crouching at the door of our lives, and wealth as priority seems to let sin in. What might the Lord be saying to you about this?
5. We also need to put our faith in God that He will fulfil His promises. What does trust in God's promises look like for you?
6. God has promised eternal relationship with Him, and the restoration of all things. He also makes specific promises to each of us. What are those promises in your life?
7. What does walking in faith and humility toward those promises look like for you?
8. Prayer and praise are the solution to whatever is happening in our lives, according to James. Is that your subconscious response? How do you manage your personal circumstances?
9. Have you ever prayed in faith for a sick person? What happened?
10. What would it look like for you to walk in faith in God and pursue healing and salvation through prayer for other people? Which is bigger for you: trust in God's word or fear of failure? Spend some time listening to God and allowing Him to fill you with peace and courage to humbly carry out His calling to each of us – to declare and demonstrate His good news, both for now and for eternity.