

Wealth and Suffering

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[0 : 0 0] So we're going to just look at this passage tonight and think about it in the context of what you've been doing at City Groups and also what you've been hearing on a Wednesday evening. And James is great, it's such a great group, so much in it. And I think at this towards the end here what he's doing is he's out working the difference it makes in our day-to-day life to be a Christian, as Jesus' followers to live by the wisdom of heaven and not by our worldly wisdom if you look back to chapter 3 and verses 13 to 16 it talks about, you know, worldly wisdom and then God's wisdom and it's as if he spends a lot of the rest of time explaining the difference between, in fact, it's quite, that's quite similar right through the book seems to be two ways to live as it were, you know, going right back to chapter 1 and verse 27 he talks about not being polluted, keeping oneself unstained from the world, don't ignore injustice, don't be polluted by the world and he makes a lot of that right throughout his letter. And here he's talking about worldly or he's talking about wealth and making wealth an idol and he's really saying that that's worldly wisdom and it's just these first five, six verses they're like Jeremiah or Ezekiel or some of the old prophets it's there's real prophetic rage when he's speaking about the injustice of those who are rich and he's railing against it with rage what he sees around him. There's different opinions about who he's speaking to here as he's speaking to rich Christians.

I suspect he's not because he talks about you rich it's kind of quite derogatory in some ways he doesn't call them brothers or sisters other places he says brothers and sisters and it's almost just he's raging against the injustice around him and but also using it as a warning and he is also he's speaking to the church he's speaking to believers but he's he's looking beyond them and seeing the kind of society that can influence the behavior of Christians it is a warning and he's he's really looking at what he sees and he says look Christians we need to be critically aware of sometimes the way the world thinks and there's things we need to leave behind or he's saying that if you're a Christian maybe even he's saying to people that he's writing to if you are Christians who have come from a rich Christians who have come from the environment a god godless environment then there's attitudes and principles and thinking in our business and in our work life that we need to put behind us because there is dangers in the pursuit of wealth isn't there and he kind of highlights here and three dangers connected with what he sees in the world around him with regard to wealth the first is in verse three where he says you know you're golden silver I've been corroded corrosion as evidence you've laid up treasure in the last days or you've hoarded treasure in the last days so he's just saying that he's decrying the attitude that is trusting in and making lots and lots of money and hoarding it up and putting your your hope in that and it just fits in with lots of the Bible which is look money's not going to last you're not going to take it with you it's rotting away you're going to die naked the same way you came into the world and it's selfish and sad to be living to pursue money and to pursue the protection that you think money is going to give you so don't hoard it that's that's one danger the second danger he says in verse four to hold the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields you've kept back by fraud and it's crying against you so here's a very specific problem of fraudulent wage oppression that was evident in the society obviously maybe today it would be paying less than the minimum wage or a living wage and generally it's it's speaking of the the oppression of the rich towards the poor who are powerless maybe using if you were updating it a little bit political or legal or business muscle to suppress and to oppress and to ignore and to take advantage of those who can't stand against that power and you know we see that all around us and he says that's that's ungodly and it's it's it's not the wisdom of God so there's hoarding there's fraudulent wage oppression and the third thing is the third thing he condemns in verse five is you've lived on the earth in luxury and self indulgence and and that's really again it's just talking about living off the benefits of sometimes fraudulent rich possession of wealth getting rich sometimes on

on immoral or illegal means but not necessarily but then using that wealth simply to be absolutely self indulgent and to live a life of opulence and luxury thinking of no one but you know yourself and and it seems to be there's this idea of you've lived on the earth and so it's it's a very earthy way of thinking that it's not spiritual it doesn't take into account the future and it's that it's the obscenity of wealth that we see that it's the inequality of wealth that we see around us often even today where there's that huge gap between those who have more than enough for a hundred lifestyles for a hundred lives and who have no interest in the needs of others but who simply hoard it for themselves so James is kind of railing against that in anger and he's saying that's not how Christians should think and live and act and we take note of of God's wisdom in all of these things which is different and I've just applied the second half of that section which talks goes on to talk about patience and suffering in the light of what's gone before so I'm taking it as one section I think in general terms we've got to stand up as James mentions here we've got to stand up for godly wisdom and the social injustice that we see around us we should all of us as Christians I think should hold loosely to political and economic ideologies I'm not saying we ignore them I'm not saying that we become separatists or insular and sectarian at all in any way but we do belong to a different kingdom and we need to use God's wisdom to critically assess the world and the philosophies of wealth creation and everything else around us in the world and we don't just point the finger we don't just cry out woe is me and go our own way but I think we need to recognise that any political or economic system is flawed and doesn't have that doesn't have God at the centre so if you take the two extremes for example in capitalism you find there's a great temptation at the end at one end of it towards greed because it appeals to the greed of humanity but then if you take socialism at one end of the scale with socialism there's the temptation to covetousness and to wanting what everyone else has and you know that there's good things in both of these things that's very simplistic I know but I don't think we should champion either economies as the hope of the world you know and and I know we don't do that but our place as Christians is to stand up for the voiceless the oppressed and the crushed for the poor both the poor in spirit and also those who have no voice in society we should be champions of them that's very difficult to do but I think that is something in our own lives we should consider in Christ you know we're always to be different if we are rich Christians because God doesn't doesn't condemn wealth creation nor does he condemn wealth per se in the Bible with a lot of rich people in the Bible but it's what we do with it and it's what's in our heart and where our trust lies it's important but if you're in business or or if you're thinking about how to deal with your money then your business ethics or the qualities of honesty and fairness generosity to staff loyalty all these things should be revolutionary for someone who is a Christian who maybe has influence in these areas and I think all the power that sometimes money allows us in this world should be used in a way as servants of God so we're servants of God in all that we do and generally I think if we don't have power if we're not business people or we don't have influence in that area similarly our attitude to money should be godly and we should have a godly wisdom I think simplicity sacrifice providing for family generosity kingdom investment trusting in God to provide not making riches an idol and not making poverty a virtue [10:56] I think the Bible speaks about all of these things and James touches on some of it here and well here and well in this section but I think also then we should live under injustice with patience and love I'm not sure whether James is speaking specifically into a situation here where he's asking his brothers to show patience but I wonder whether he may be speaking here to brothers to Christians who are victims of rich oppressors that he has railed against in the previous section or maybe he's speaking to Christians within the community who are shoulder live shoulder to shoulder with rich brothers and sisters and are tempted to grumble against them talks about that in verse 8 do not grumble against another brother and it may be in that context that there's a tension between rich and poor in the Christian community but let's broaden it a bit because he's speaking about patience and it may be patience in relation to this or it may generally be the need for patience in a world that doesn't love Christ and doesn't serve Christ and he uses three different words another quick three ones three different words for patience here or three different concepts the first is is just the word patience in seven and eight where he talks about waiting for the the harvest to come you know there's nothing you can do about it once you've planted the seed it's just got to wait for the harvest to come and hopefully in Scotland we'll get some sun to bring out the seeds and to bring something to growth but that's literally waiting it's literally being patient having a different perspective recognizing that God's timing is different to ours that we have an eternal

perspective and every day we need that patience because life is tough marriage is tough families are tough employment is tough people's attitudes are tough to us our attitudes to others sometimes may be tough but there's a million different reasons that we might grumble today you might have got up today and thought and had a right good grumble or maybe as the day went on you had a right good grumble because it's easy to and you might have had a right good grumble against someone else who's a Christian today and it's very easy for us and so God calls us not to grumble and be patient with other people and with our brothers and sisters in Christ and not judge one another but just be patient and that may apply to you in a whole lot of different ways today I don't know and then the second sort of illustration or second description of patience is in verse 8 where he says establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand and that the

NIV has stand firm there and this is kind of more about having a a steely resolve and being rooted in Christ who's a rock stand firm there don't let anything move you it's more like a really a really strong attitude of mind and let Jesus be your influencer I'm not I'm not of an age or stage to really know what an influencer is very much but apparently now you can make lots of money by being an influencer on social media whether it's clothes or restaurants or whatever and if you get lots of followers you become an influencer now as Christians we want Jesus to be our number one influencer and so we stand firm in him and we go back to him and we establish our hearts so that at every point when we're trying to be impatient we find ourselves going back to him so patience standing firm which is a little bit more active and then the third one is in verse 11 about being steadfast behold we consider those blessed to remain steadfast you've heard of the steadfastness of job and that's the whole idea of actually keeping on the right road persevering even when it's tough it's like walking uphill keeping going even when your legs are really sore and not giving up so there's there's waiting there's standing and there's keeping going three slightly different elements that we're encouraged to do now I'm not going to apply that you might have a myriad different ways of applying that truth to your own heart today maybe you've had a horrible day maybe there's been things that have really pushed you towards in patience or giving up or being fed up with with your faith or with other people and so I certainly having prepared this last yesterday was in great need of it last night for one or two different reasons and sometimes you remember you remember after you've prepared something oh actually that's God maybe speaking to me first before he's speaking to anyone else so patience however you apply that can be a word from the Holy Spirit now I'm just going to finish now but can anyone tell me that there's something in this passage that I haven't mentioned that's quite significant to anyone thinking oh Derek's talked about wealth and about patience but he hasn't mentioned something else that's in this passage kind of in both sections if you look at the both section anyone going to be brave enough to suggest what I've missed out no judgment judgment ah Thomas you couldn't couldn't resist could he couldn't resist we couldn't get unmuted we had a year I know I think there was a few people said something I noticed a few mouths moving but they were unmuted they were muted so yeah judgment it's quite interesting that both sections really verse five well both you've got the the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts you've lived in earth and luxured yourself you've fattened your hearts in the day of slaughter which is very colorful language and then in verse eight we have that you know for the coming of the Lord is at hand and then it goes on to speak about the judge standing at the door and I think that's he also talks about job I haven't

a time to look at job but you know isn't that interesting that that James is speaking in the last days you know the days between Christ's first and second coming and you know he talks about the day of the Lord being near and the judge is standing at the door and there's that sense in which the day of the Lord the coming of the Lord is at hand and we just remember that when you sit at the Lord's table which we've done that quite a bit in the last week while during lockdown it's always until he comes and that's an important element and James speaks about that day being near now that's obviously in God's timescale and not necessarily as a day as a thousand years and a thousand years a day but the judge is standing at the door and it's interesting isn't it that James has that perspective in terms of godly living how we live with money how we deal with matters that tend to drive us towards impatience he says that listen what you're saying today

God hears all the cries he's hearing all the cries of the injustice in the society we live in and the injustice we see there's not one wrong that will be ignored on that last day there's not one injustice that will not be dealt with there's not one sin that will be left unpunished no evil will be victorious on that day and we remember that our sins are already dealt with and already punished that's why that

last great day that will be different for us and as Christians therefore we're not to take that place of judgment and we're not to be this we're not the standard and we don't take God's place we're not the judges we are to discern between right and wrong but we don't grumble and we don't complain and we don't condemn we are accountable as Christians to live by grace and we are answerable to God on that last great day for how we've used his gifts of grace and wisdom and that's a really challenging thought I've never found myself terribly comfortable under that truth but we are accountable we're forgiven we're his children but nonetheless will be held to account for how we've used our gifts and how we've served God and how we have borne fruit in our lives and maybe that's worth discussing at city group when it comes up because it's very challenging and it's sobering and I think it stops us from being critical and judgmental or careless or unjust or uncaring about those who have no voice and those who have no one to represent them in this world so that's me done