

James 26-09-16b

Let's pick up our study here in the book of James. And again, the movement here is so elegant and so beautiful under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We start in the early part of the book, looking at ourselves, getting our heart and our attitude squared away, looking to God for wisdom.

Then extending from that area of subjectivity, eyes on self in an unhealthy, unhappy way to our eyes on others. How do we treat others? Do we look to them for advantage? Are we sensitive to their needs? Do we talk badly about them and judge them or are we merciful and gracious? God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble and we should keep that in mind. And then moving to circumstances, eyes on things.

The three categories that we commonly as a memory aid think of as subjectivity, eyes on self, eyes on people. Now, eyes on circumstances, eyes on things, friendship with the world. How can I get ahead by earthly means, by worldly mechanisms? And this come now reminds us of that Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24 exhortation to remember to not boast in our own efforts, to not get excited about it and celebrate it when it comes off well.

That isn't the measure of success. We should glory in our burgeoning and growing and fruitful relationship with our father in heaven that we understand and know him and rejoice in his character, in his love of righteousness and justice. So that brings us now to chapter five and we continue our look at this third species of subjectivity that deflects us, neutralizes us, blinds us to our own problems, blinds us to the needs of others and instead distracts us into the satanic deception that the way to get ahead is the way the world thinks.

So come now, he says again in chapter five, verse one, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth eaten. You can't help but think back to chapter one, verse nine and again to the favoritism that he warns against paying attention in chapter two, verse three, to the one wearing the fine clothes, saying, come up and sit in a good place.

Do not the rich in verse six of chapter two oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? They don't respect the Lord. They're not humble. They are not invested in a relationship with God.

They're out to get what they can get and they've got the money to sue you and take everything you've got. These are those rich. So now we come to their fate.

Your gold and silver are corroded and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. Do you not find this confusing? I find this confusing. Look at it.

Your gold and your silver are corroded. What is one of the intrinsic qualities of gold and silver that make it valuable and prized? It doesn't corrode. Gold can be mixed with things and you might end

up with something strange happening.

Silver can tarnish, but with a little bit of effort, it comes right back. They are precious because they endure, they're rare, and they don't tend to corrode. Gold certainly does not corrode.

No matter what you do to it, you can find something made of gold in a treasure chest in a shipwreck. It can survive for hundreds of years. Crack the barnacles off and here's the gold as beautiful as it was the day it was cast.

So how can it say your gold and your silver have corroded? This is so fascinating to me. This is why I love the Greek language. It is so expressive and it is so accessible to us.

This word that says your gold and silver are corroded and they're corrosion. You've got a verb, a passive verb, and then a noun. They're both from the same root.

Corroded is the word katiao, K-A-T-I-O-O, omicron omega, two different O's in Greek, a-o. Katiao, K-A-T-I-O-O. Fascinating word.

And interestingly, it is used and means poison. The root is I-O-S, eos. And you can see it in the kata, according to, that's K-A-T, that's the prefix.

It's the preposition kata, alongside according to. And then you have eotai, which is eos. And it means poison.

It's such a better translation. I don't understand why they didn't resort to this to begin with. Read it with a fresh understanding of the word.

Your gold and silver are poisonous and their poison will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. The poison will destroy your flesh, consume your flesh like fire. It's not just rust or tarnish, it's poison.

You remember the Lord Jesus saying, camel, I have a needle. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom. Why? Those riches have to be handled so carefully.

We can handle poisons. They have their uses, but you have to be exceedingly careful. Rubber gloves, eye protection, depending on the strength.

And if it is aerosolized, you might need a mask to avoid breathing in the fumes. We can handle poison, but it has to be done so carefully. Don't take by mouth.

If it gets in your eyes, here's what to do. If somebody swallows it, here's what to do. If it gets on your skin, here's what to do.

Be so very careful. It is possible to be rich and to be godly, but it is extremely difficult because

these riches are what we could say today, radioactive. And if you don't take steps, you will end up in the flesh being destroyed by them.

This ties so beautifully into that previous thought, doesn't it? That pursuing profit, looking in the world and thinking, I can use the mechanisms of the world and I will get ahead and I will fatten my bank account and improve my investments and set myself up for old age and retirement. I can't tell you the number of times that I have gone to tune a piano at a wonderful piece of property with a beautiful home. There's a boat in the driveway.

There's wonderful equipment sitting around that can be used for all kinds of purposes. However, the individual who lives there now is elderly, very elderly. And is no longer able to enjoy those things.

The flesh has deteriorated. Strength and ability have deteriorated. And all of these things that they accumulated are sitting with weeds growing.

And the house is in disrepair. Beautiful house, but it needs paint. It needs the soffits and the guttering and the windows and the caulking, the doors, the windows.

It is a remnant of past glory. But because the grass withers and the flower fades, we inevitably can't continue to enjoy these things, much less take them into the future. And it is very poignant to realize that there was a time when there was youth and strength and activity and fruitfulness and joy in these things.

But all of the accumulation doesn't get you through the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune when you get old. And somebody sitting in a wheelchair is not gonna roll out there and climb on the tractor or get in the boat and go on the lake, launch it, retrieve it. The RV, you can no longer hook it up and haul it to a state park and enjoy a weekend or a week of camping.

A holiday visit, travel around the country. It's transient, it is ephemeral. It's certainly fun and joyful in the moment, but it doesn't have that persistence, that lasting value.

And this is what James is talking about here. These things, these accumulations, these acquisitions, your gold and silver are poison. If you hang onto them too long, if you hug them too close, they will eat your flesh like fire.

And as Jesus said, mammon is the comprehensive word for possessions and accumulations and riches. And you can't serve mammon and also serve God. You will, no man can serve two masters.

You will hate one and love the other or vice versa, but they cannot be reconciled. You can have great riches as long as you don't care. And I have known people that were wonderful, godly individuals, possessed of great wealth.

You wouldn't know it to look at them. They were interested in, why did God put this under my control? Obviously it is for his work and his ministry. All I need to do now is sort out where and how to put this wealth into the Lord's work.

No personal aspirations, no putting on of airs, just the daily fun task of figuring out who can benefit, who can leverage this wherewithal into the work of the Lord and the preaching of the gospel and the growth of believers in Christ. But it is a rare thing. These riches will turn to poison.

Poison is the word. And their poison will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. When? At the judgment.

When our lives are assessed and evaluated and the distraction and the deflection, the pursuit, the energy, the subjectivity that went into mastering circumstances and trying to get to the end of the game with the most toys, as they put it sometimes, will witness against us. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Notice the context here.

You've heaped up treasure. When is all of this going to come to account? In the last days. It's a bit awkward in English, but the context is the judgment in the last days.

Verse four, indeed, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out. Then the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts. And he recalls the Old Testament.

Name of the Lord. Why? What did the law say? Watch out for the widow and the orphan and the poor brothers in your midst. Look out for them.

Make provision for them. Leave the corners of your fields uncleaned. Do not exploit them.

Do not rob them of their due. This gets back to the arrogant attitude in our first come now section. So this is not only self-gratification, self-aggrandizement, self-promotion.

It is also abuse of others. It is at the hands. And this gets back to that word, making merchandise, making a profit at other's expense.

I don't care how badly it offends others or affects others. I'm gonna make a profit. It takes me a year.

I'll make a profit. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury. You have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

Fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. So many verses of scripture. I would encourage you, if you want to explore each of these concepts, the new treasury of scripture knowledge is your friend.

I would love to go to every one of these cross references that it offers for the corrosion, the poison, Matthew chapter six, verse 20. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor corrosion destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. They will be a witness against you.

There are Old Testament witnesses. People would heap together a pile of rocks or erect a stone monument and say, this is a witness. You see this in Joshua 24, 27.

This stone shall be a witness to you, Joshua says. It has heard all the words of the Lord, which he spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God.

In Matthew chapter eight, verse four, Jesus said, see that you tell no one to the cleansed lepers, go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded as a testimony to them. Our witness should be our faithfulness and obedience to the word. We don't want our efforts and what we have accumulated witnessing against us.

The song that we heard on the break has as one of its lines, your life will be your witness. And the scriptures show the way. Luke chapter nine, verse five, whoever will not receive you and the word of God that you communicate when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a witness, as a testimony against them.

Actions matter. They will witness for us or against us. The desire for human comforts and possessions and security on the world's terms will witness against us in the last days.

You have heaped treasure to yourself in the last days, these last days that James speaks of. Peter says in second Peter three, three, scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own desires. The very same word James has used above here.

And those desires will be a witness at the judgment. Paul says to Timothy in second Timothy three, one, know this, in the last days, perilous times will come. We are in the last days.

Doesn't matter how much time remains in human history. For us, we are in the last days because our last days are the last days of our life. We won't see whatever subsequent human history comes along.

We are living in the last days. These are the last days we will observe, experience, have the chance to redeem. Redeeming the time, knowing that the days left to themselves are evil.

Must avoid this subjectivity. First John 2, 18, written nearly 2000 years ago. What does John, James' brother say? First John 2, 18, little children, it is the last hour.

As you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come by which we know that it is the last hour. Many alternatives to Christ. Anti means instead of in Greek.

What are we pursuing instead of Christ? What are we celebrating and glorying in? Are we glorying in the Lord or are we glorying in our strength and our might and our human wisdom and our friendship with the world? So this second section is a partner to the first in reminding us of the perils and the danger and the intrinsic poison in materialism. Friendship with the world, the ways of the world, the acquisitive and self-gratifying attitude that characterizes the world. Come now.

Come out from among them and be separate is God's call. So this makes sense. We don't need a depth of interpretation here.

If you live on the earth in pleasure and luxury and fatten your heart as in a day of slaughter, you have condemned, you have murdered the just. He does not resist you. And the outcome, this is a different sense than what we saw earlier with murdering one another.

You say, well, aren't they murdering each other here? Acquisition at all costs, taking advantage of others, depriving them of their wages can lead to death. And James says, to the extent that you are defrauding others and withholding justly earned and due wages, and these people are at the point of starvation and their children are malnourished and underfed, there can be physical death and you are charged with and will be held accountable for murder. Their lives, whatever negative qualities result from your treatment of others is on you, up to and including loss of life.

You will be charged with murder because in your selfishness, you are insensitive to need. You see this in the judgment at the end of the millennial kingdom, the sheep and goats judgment. When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was sick and in prison, did you visit me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? If you've done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it to me, my brethren, fellow believers.

So therefore, verse seven, and remember I've introduced this last time, this is James speaking to the brethren in the synagogue, in the church meeting. My brethren, he's exhorting, he's encouraging, he's calling them to better ways, to faithfulness and obedience, to looking at the law and not forgetting what it exposes, looking in that mirror, not forgetting what it shows us. He looks out the window at the rich and characterizes them.

He uses the second person, plural, but he has warned the brethren against becoming friends and taking sides and trying to enter into that group. Now he's gonna return to address the brethren. He looks out the window and says, you rich, you're in trouble.

You rich are gonna be called to account. You rich need to change your ways. He said, weep and mourn.

Clear back in the first chapter. And he repeats it here. Now he returns to the brethren in verse seven.

Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the parousia, until the appearance, the coming, the presence

of the Lord. This is a Christian doctrinal truth. James is an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And like Paul, he exhorts his brethren so that they be not ashamed at his coming, at his parousia. It is near, it is the last days. So be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

Where have we seen patience before? Chapter one, the testing of your faith in verse three produces patience. Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. We journey through the middle of this book, looking at these different areas of challenge.

My own heart, my own thinking, my own tongue, and my own actions. Then judging and finding fault with the actions of others. And then being immersed in the world and caught up in the ways of the world and seeking to get ahead and acquire material goods and embracing that poison, which will testify against those who so do in the last days.

Now we are back to patience. Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The example is the farmer who waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the former and latter, the early and the late rains.

Early rains, that's not enough. You've gotta be patient. You've gotta wait for that crop to mature.

We learn things from the word of God. We experience hardship. We have our faith tested.

We develop patience. We wait for it to have its perfect work, its mature work, in the same way that a farmer plants seed and waits for it to germinate, to sprout, to grow, to come to its fullness and its maturity and to produce manifold copies of that original seed. It's a process and it requires patience.

Let patience have its perfect work. Be patient, and this work is going to continue until the Lord returns, either in the air while we are alive and remain or at the point of our death, as from the body, face-to-face with the Lord. These are the last days.

These are the last days. So wait for the early and the latter rain. God will send the rain.

There may be a gap where we feel like there's not enough rain. There's early rain and there's latter rain. Wait for it.

You also be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is near. It is at hand.

It's as near as our last breath. It's so shocking when we hear of someone who loses their life early by our calculation, accident, an onset of a disease that takes them in their 30s or in their 40s, and we think he just had barely gotten off to a good start. Tragically, even younger than that.

But we should treat every day as the last days. Make the most of it. Make it count.

We don't know how many are left. There's one less today than there was yesterday. So the coming of the Lord is at hand.

That's the review of chapter one. And instead of subjectively worrying about our challenges and our hardships in a subjective eyes on self way, curate our own heart. Go back and read chapter one again.

Then bridling the tongue, not judging fellow believers. That's in verse nine. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned, lest you be judged.

Judge not, lest you be judged. You can see how he's pulling from his previous argument and bringing these things together and tying a very beautiful bow on this message. Don't forget, you've got to pay attention to your own heart and ensure that you're right before the Lord and you're asking him for wisdom and developing this patience that is the foundation for the mature ability to bridle the tongue, to maintain proper attitudes toward others, to not judge, and not judging the law and the righteous judge that he mentioned earlier.

Behold, the judge is standing at the door. Don't be trying to do his job when he's about to walk into the room. Occasionally, when you're young and in school, the teacher has to leave the room.

She's called away or he's called away and some sort of flippant lad will go sit in the teacher's chair and mock the teacher and caricature them and so on. And it's quite sobering when the teacher unexpectedly walks back into the room and catches them doing that. It typically doesn't end well.

There is that type of thing here. The judge is standing at the door. Don't be trying to judge when the judge is looking in the door.

My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of suffering and patience. You have this in the last of the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter five. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you for my name's sake.

Rejoice and be glad, be happy. That's the way they treated the prophets before you. If we are living a life that reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus and we're not glorying in ourselves and our accomplishments and our plans, that is a testimony, it is a witness.

Take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of suffering and patience. Jewish brethren, recognizing how God blessed and honored the faithfulness of the prophets that he called to testify and to witness despite the hardships they experienced. Read the latter part of Hebrews chapter 11.

Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord, that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. He's

reiterating and has a symmetrical treatment of this theme from chapter one.

Count it all joy when you fall into trials, knowing that God is at work in and through it. But above all, brethren, verse 12, do not swear by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. Let your yes be yes and your no be no, lest you fall into judgment.

This is a subject that will require its own treatment next time. But what have we seen thus far at the end of chapter four and into chapter five? How important is it for us to remember who we are and why we're here? Daily called to avoid the subjectivity of unhealthy attitudes about ourself, unhealthy ambitions, and the indulging of unhealthy desires, rather than cultivating the patience and the divine viewpoint that makes us objective and not subjective in the area of self. Let me see myself from God's point of view, knowing that the judge is standing at the door, how do I treat others? Eyes on people.

I should treat them as the word calls, as love dictates, not looking at them as the means to gratify or satisfy, or in some other way, promote myself and satisfy myself. And then in the area of circumstances in the world, am I interested in being a part of what God is accomplishing or am I consumed with what I'm accomplishing? Subjectivity is the theme of the book of James. Eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstance.

What is the wrong, human, worldly way of looking in these three areas? What is the objective, godly, wisdom from above way? One is going to result in wars and fights. It's going to result in the things we see in the description of chapter three, verse 15. The wisdom that does not descend from above is earthly, sensual, fleshly, sarkikos, and demonic.

Opposite worlds, opposite objectives, opposite effects, and opposite outcomes at the judgment where we will all arrive. This is the last days. It is the last hour.

We know this because the spirit of Antichrist, John tells us, is already at work, pulling us, deceiving us, endeavoring to deflect and distract and neutralize us. It's demonic, but it hooks into our flesh. It hooks into our natural tendency to subjectivity.

The sarkikos man, the human soul that is born this way and instinctively reacts this way. We should instead be careful, even when we look toward heaven. And that's where we will pick up next time in chapter five, verse 12, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the strength and the power and the sharp, so carefully directed edge of your word as it pierces to the very center of our being, exposes our thoughts and intents so that we can confess, so that we can cultivate humility, so that we can ask for your wisdom and watch for its effects of peace and gentleness and benefit toward others and the reflection of the glory of the Lord Jesus that can be created in us and transmitted through us to those in our near periphery and beyond into the world. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, God, the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding in terms of our personal application so that our lives will reflect

your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name, amen.