



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## Those Who Trust — and Some Who Don't

James 4:13-5:11

David Anguish

### Introduction

1. In the 17th century, English minister David Clarkson observed that, if we think of our soul as a house, “‘idols are set up in every room, . . .’” So, we tend to “prefer our own wisdom to God’s wisdom, our own desires to God’s will, and our own reputation to God’s honor.”<sup>1</sup>
2. Clarkson’s four-century old observation reminds us that these serious problems are not new.
3. In previous sermons, we focused on different aspects of James’s repeated warning about “speaking against” others. In addition to an exposition of 4:11-12, we looked in particular at the issue of gossip as an example of the continuing challenge to be single-minded in living the faith. It is always tempting to choose our wisdom, desires, and glorification over God’s.
4. As we continue exploring James’s text, we see that he demonstrates an important addition to Clarkson’s reminder: that things that start off small can grow to become sinister behaviors that “ignor[e] God’s ethical imperatives.”<sup>2</sup>
5. In a section that includes “the harshest rhetoric of the whole letter,”<sup>3</sup> James directs attention to the problems of self-reliance, self-indulgence, and the challenges they present to devoted believers. Before exploring the section’s parts, we benefit from seeing how it fits together.

### Body

- I. Making Sense of James 4:13-5:11.
  - A. Recall that there were originally no chapter-verse breaks in the letter, and that the original recipients likely would have first heard the whole letter in one sitting. How does the section before us fit in the whole?
    1. That James has shifted to a new theme is clear.
      - a) The subject matter changes from the tongue, the influence of wisdom on its use, and the strife that results when it is abused (3:1-4:12) to the casual and callous

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*, 154.

<sup>2</sup> Dan G. McCartney, *James*, The Baker Exegetical New Testament Commentary, 223.

<sup>3</sup> Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 214.

misuse of wealth and the response to oppression expected of faithful believers (4:13-5:11).

- b) The repetition of "Come now" (Ἄγε νῦν, *Age nyn*) in 4:13; 5:1 and use of "therefore" (οὖν, *oun*) in 5:7 tie the three paragraphs together; we can express the theme this way: "don't be arrogant; don't be materialistic; instead, be patient."<sup>4</sup>
  2. But, 4:13-5:11 are not completely disconnected from what has gone before.
    - a) Some note the emphasis on what is said and should be said in 4:13, 15 and suggest that James is still dealing with the issue of the abused tongue.
    - b) The condemnation of "boasting" (καυχάομαι, *kauchaomai*; καύχησις, *kauchēsis* – 4:16), the result of demonic wisdom (3:14-16), support this observation.<sup>5</sup>
  - B. Taken together, we conclude that there is a shift in emphasis, but that, as he does throughout the writing, James is continuing one main theme.
    1. The three specific examples show other ways of playing God (see 4:11-12).
    2. Remember the emphasis on God's grace to the humble and his resistance of the proud (4:6 - ὑπερήφανος, *hyperēphanos*, a synonym for "arrogant") (4:6, 10).
    3. In 4:13-5:6, James moves to other examples of pride; in 5:7-11, he calls his believers to maintain humility and remain steadfast.
- II. Warnings from the Untrusting (4:13-5:6).
- A. The merchants in 4:13-17 represent those who waver because they were *self-reliant*.
    1. Their emphasis was on what *they* would do as they planned without regard for the realities of temporal lives.
    2. They were presuming knowledge (4:14) that no human can possibly possess.
    3. They exemplified "autonomous planning" (Blomberg & Kamell, 203) in the extreme, playing God just as surely as were those who were judging in 4:11-12.
  - B. The landowners in 5:1-6 were an example of what happened when the presumptuous attitudes of the self-reliant were taken to an extreme; they were *self-indulgent*.
    1. In a subtle form of idolatry, they were trusting in the inferior (5:2-3).
    2. Overvaluing their possessions, they minimized or ignored God's eternal values (5:3-4).
    3. Seeking mainly their own desires, they oppressed the righteous (5:5-6).
  - C. Do not miss the significance of what James says here.
    1. He is not issuing a blanket condemnation of making a profit, owning land, or even being rich; in his setting, these were pertinent examples of faithlessness.
    2. His concern is in line with the theme of the writing as a whole.
      - a) The real issue was in planning and living without "tak[ing] God's will into account" (Blomberg & Kamell, 203), living as if God did not exist or matter.<sup>6</sup>
      - b) The problem was that of divided loyalty (at best) or disloyalty, the opposite of real faith, whatever one's profession might have been.

<sup>4</sup> George M. Stulac, *James*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 157.

<sup>5</sup> See Ralph Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary 48: 159-162.

<sup>6</sup> "Anyone who pursues a career or runs a business without reference to God's will, or who controls property or makes investments without reference to God's ethical concerns and in defiance of his principles of equity, is subject to James's opprobrium [reproach]" (McCartney, 224).

3. But, do not miss this either: the difference in the severity of the sin of the landowners as compared to the merchants did not let the merchants off the hook.

### III. A Call to Steadfast Trust (5:7-11).

- A. These verses appreciate the trials faced by believers ("brothers" - 5:7) because of the casual attitude of and callous treatment by those who were disloyal.
- B. In a nutshell, James's remedy is threefold.
  1. Trust God implicitly, however dark things appeared (5:8, 10-11).
  2. Remain focused and therefore live faithfully so as not to be subject to the same judgment awaiting their oppressors (5:9; cf. 4:1-3).
  3. Be patient (μακροθυμέω, *makrothymēō*; μακροθυμέω, *makrothymia* – vv. 7, 8, 10) and steadfast (ὑπομένω, *hypomenō*; ὑπομονή, *hypomonē* – v. 11; cf. 1:3-4, 12): God works in his own time and way.
- C. 4:13-5:11 illustrates the theme of James: endure, remain focused, undivided in purpose and demonstrating behavior consistent with the nature of genuine faith.

### Conclusion

1. As is true of the Bible's story generally, James reminds us that the life well lived versus the one not well lived comes down to the question of fundamental loyalty: will we commit to and grow in service to the spiritual, eternal God or settle for lives grounded in lesser things?
2. One method God uses to accentuate that choice is to provide examples of people who made that choice in different ways: some warn us as we observe their poor choices while others encourage us to make the right ones.
3. The test to gauge which choice we are making is found in what we observe as we evaluate where we "spend most of [our] passion and energy, [our] emotional and financial resources . . . without a second thought" (Keller, xviii). What choice are you making?

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