



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Living in the Last Days

James 5:7-11

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Introduction

1. James 5:7-9 reminds us of James's interest in the idea of last things (eschatology), commonly called "the judgment" (which he references in more than 20 of his 108 verses).
 - a. We immediately notice 5:1-11, and especially vv. 7-11.
 - b. There are direct references in 2:12-13; 3:1; and 4:11-12.
 - c. Less direct references assume the theme, using different terms (1:12) or implied reminders as motivation for Christian ethics (1:9-11, 21; 2:5; 4:9-10; 5:15, 19-20).
2. James used it to exhort and warn his readers to the extent that we are tempted to say that James is at least partly *about* last things. But, Peter Davids explains that the idea is bigger than that:

Yet eschatology is not the burden of the book; it is the context of the book. James shares a thought-world with his readers, . . . This community, like Paul's (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2), has seen to it that the apocalyptic teaching is among the basics of the faith. Without an appreciation of the foundational role this teaching played in the Christian world view of James's church, one could hardly understand the joy referred to in 1:2, 12. This is . . . anticipated joy in the face of trials because of the reward which one knows is fast approaching."¹
3. Davids reminds us that the idea is often discussed today as the last event in a series of events, and/or one of the key Christian teachings we eventually should study.
 - a. We cannot get completely away from that; it is the "last event", in terms of this world, at least, and it almost has to be studied as a separate topic.
 - b. But, the broader New Testament understanding integrated eschatology with all the major concepts of the Christian faith² and thus gave direction to their hope and ethics.
4. To more better understand their sense of joyful hope and Christ-directed life, we should try to understand and identify with their thought-world.

¹ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 39.

² "The Parousia is important in that it serves as an intersection of Christian understandings of christology, eschatology and soteriology: as the supreme moment of revelation of Jesus Christ as Lord for all the created order to see, as the culmination of God's eternal purposes as they are worked out in human affairs and as the time at which the world is judged and believers are granted resurrection existence and are ultimately united with their Lord." (L. J. Kreitzer, "Parousia," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, 856.)

Body

I. An Overlooked Fundamental: We Are Now Living in the “Last Days.”

- A. “The last days” (Jas. 5:3) represents an important NT assumption about our era.
1. Hebrews 1:1-2 highlights the contrast between the former days and “these last days” (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3; 1 John 2:18).
 2. Acts 2:17 shows the origin of this belief among Christians: in explaining the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, Peter said it was the realization of Joel’s expectation of what would happen “in the last days” (cf. Joel 2:28).
 3. He also connects “the last days” and “day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20; Joel 2:31).
 4. Contrary to the way many use the phrase today – to refer to “the end times” – the New Testament understanding is that “the last days” began with the resurrection of Jesus and will continue until his coming.
- B. This is a Christian explanation of a long-held Jewish idea.
1. “The day of the Lord ” “referred to the expectation of God’s final judgment on the ungodly and the liberation and restoration of his people in the age to come.”³
 - a) Prior to the exile, the phrase conveyed an expectation that the Lord “would come to judge the foreign nations and, at the same time, to deliver and bless his people Israel” (cf. Amos 5:18-20; etc.).⁴
 - b) After the exile, the expectation was “that Israel’s enemies would be judged and the faithful remnant experience God’s salvation in a future age (e.g., Is 61:1-2; Zech 12-14; Mal 4:1-6)” (Webb, 264).
 - c) The post-exilic understanding developed more between the testaments.
 2. New Testament emphasis reflected the Jewish focus on both judgment and salvation, but also reinterpreted “the day of the Lord” in terms of Jesus.
 - a) Several texts speak of “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8; cf. 2 Cor. 1:14), “the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16), etc., to stress that he is now the agent of God’s judgment.⁵
 - b) This judgment would occur in concert with his “coming”⁶ as the culmination of “the last days.”
 - c) With these concepts interwoven, the coming of the Lord (παρουσία, *parousia*) has been seen as multifaceted, referring to “an act of vindication, a time of visitation, a decisive moment of judgment, a time of deliverance and the climactic event of consummation. The boundaries of these ideas are difficult to define. . . . [C]ollectively they constitute the multi-dimensional nature of Christian proclamation about the Parousia, the advent of Jesus Christ” (Kreitzer, 858).

³ R. L. Webb, “Day of the Lord,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, 264.

⁴ Ibid. Amos and other pre-exilic prophets effectively challenged part of the common view, insisting that “the day of the Lord” would also entail judgment of unfaithful Israel.

⁵ Other texts use equivalent phrases: e.g., “the day” (Heb. 10:25), “the great day” (Jude 6), “the great day of wrath” and “the great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 6:17; 16:14). See Kreitzer, 858.

⁶ See these texts which use παρουσία (*parousia*): Matt. 24:3, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8; Jas. 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28. But, notice that there are other words that are sometimes employed as functional equivalents: e.g., φανερόω (*phaneroō*), ἔρχομαι (*erchomai*), ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*) and ἐπιφάνης (*epiphaneis*) [the latter in Acts 2:20; see below]. See Kreitzer, 858.

II. Summary and Significance.

- A. We get a sense of the significance of these things for life in the early chapters of Acts.
 1. We've noticed Peter's declaration that "the last days" had begun with events that will culminate in the day of the Lord (Acts 2:17-20).
 2. Peter's second sermon shows its importance for faithful living in light of the Lord's coming (Acts 3:19-21).
 - a) Repentance and conversion are needed to bring forgiveness (19).
 - b) This would lead to "times of refreshing" from the Lord (20).
 - c) But the end result will be the fulfillment of the prophetic expectations to see all things restored, to be accomplished when "the Lord send[s] the Christ appointed for you, Jesus" (20-21).
- B. We also see it in the writings of Paul, whose "theology . . . cannot be properly understood without reference to his expectations of the partial presence and imminent expectation of a new age."⁷ Time permits only a brief treatment of 1 Thess. 5:1-11.
 1. Beginning the second part of a section where revelations about the Lord's coming (4:15; cf. 2:19; 3:13; 5:23) are elaborated more, Paul reminded them that they did not know when the culmination of the last days will be (5:1-3).
 2. That ignorance should not dampen their hope as "children of the day" (5:4-7).
 3. What was expected was faithful living, in order to "obtain (περιποίησις, *peripoiēsis*) salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9).
 4. He "died for us so that we might live with him" (5:10).
 5. Verse 11 concludes the section with a different slant on faithfulness: "Therefore encourage (παράκαλέω, *parakaleō*; cf. Rom. 12:1; etc.) one another and build up (οικοδομέω, *oikodomeō*; cf. 1 Cor. 14:4, 17) one another (εἰς τὸν ἕνα, *eis ton hena*, literally "unto the one") just as you are doing."
 6. It is apparent that, though Paul was urging them to look forward to the culmination of events, the prospect of the Lord's coming is seen as the motivation for right living in the meantime and the hope that enables endurance when that living is challenged.

Conclusion

1. There is so much more to this idea in the New Testament where it was seen to impact every part of faith and practice.
2. What I hope we see from what we've studied today is that we are in "the last days" of the glorious plan of God, the culmination of which could come at any time, and the certainty of which should strengthen our resolve and encourage our hope.
3. As Jim Hill put it, "What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see, And I look upon his face – the One who saved me by His grace; When He takes me by the hand, and leads me to the Promised Land, What a day, glorious day, that will be."⁸

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⁷ Christopher Rowland, "Parousia," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 5:168. Time and space do not permit a study of the relevant passages and their implications here. For starters, see Acts 17:31; Rom. 6:1-14; 8:18-25; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1-3; Col. 3:1-4; 1 Thess. 2-5.

⁸ Jim Hill, "What a Day That Will Be," *Songs of Faith and Praise*, ed. Alton H. Howard, song # 916.