



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

## He Stands Just Outside the Door

James 5:7-8

David Anguish

### *Introduction*

1. We saw in a previous sermon how interested James was in “last things.”
  - a. We see it immediately in 5:1-11, and especially vv. 7-11.
  - b. There are direct references in 2:12-13; 3:1; and 4:11-12.
  - c. Indirect 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. We also noticed this quotation which helps us understand why James had such interest:
 

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.<sup>1</sup>
3. We will review why the early church thought that way, show how that helps us understand the NT emphasis on Jesus’ coming and its nearness, and see how James used this expectation to encourage and motivate his readers.

### *Body*

- I. A Review of Last Days and Last Things.
  - A. The disciples understood that “the last days/time” of Jewish expectation (cf. Jas. 5:3) began with Jesus’ glorification and sending of the Spirit (Acts 2:17; cf. Heb. 1:1-2).
  - B. Culminating the last days is “the day of the Lord,” also interpreted in light of Christ.
    1. The Jews expected judgment for their enemies and reception of salvation by the faithful remnant in a future age (e.g., Is 61:1-2; Zech 12-14; Mal 4:1-6).
    2. The disciples spoke of the coming day as “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,” etc. (1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16).
    3. Acts 3:19-21 illustrates the partially begun-ultimately to be completed nature of their expectation for the last days and the day of the Lord.

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

- a) Peter calls for repentance and conversion (19).
- b) He reassures them that following Jesus leads to “times of refreshing” from the Lord (20).
- c) They would realize all God had planned when “the Lord send[s] the Christ appointed for you, Jesus” (20-21).

## II. Things This Teaching Helps Us Understand.

### A. The frequency of coming / appearance language as part of their real life exhortations.

1. Παρουσία (*parousia*-appearance, coming; Jas. 5:7-8) is used often in the New Testament to refer to the day of the Lord (e.g., Matt. 24:37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; 2 Pet. 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28).
2. Synonymous words add to the emphasis, for example:<sup>2</sup>
  - a) φανερώω (*phaneroō*), make known, show – 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 John 2:28; 3:2.
  - b) ἔρχομαι (*erchomai*), come – Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 4:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 1:7; 3:10-11; 22:7, 12, 20.<sup>3</sup>
  - c) ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*), revelation, disclosure – 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13.<sup>4</sup>
  - d) ἐπιφάνεια (*epiphaneia*), appearing, appearance – 2 Thess. 2:8 (with παρουσία); 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Tit. 2:13.
3. First Thessalonians 3:11-13 (cf. 5:23) illustrates how the idea of his coming is part of the context of their walk: they were to grow in community love so they would be established blameless in holiness “at the coming of our Lord Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

### B. Their sense that his coming was near (cf. Jas. 5:8).

1. “At hand” or “near” (NASB) (ἐγγίζω, *eggizō*) appears several times in the New Testament, e.g., in the Gospels for the nearness of God’s reign (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; etc.) and more generally to refer to things being near in space (e.g., Matt. 21:1; 26:46) and time (e.g., Matt. 21:34; 26:45).
2. Keeping both space and time in view can help us make sense of the so-called “delay of the παρουσία.”<sup>6</sup>
3. James gives a clue for resolving the dilemma in his warning in v. 9 when he tells them that “the Judge is standing at the door,” a figure sounding more spatial than temporal (though we cannot ignore the latter) and that fits their assumption of being in the last days awaiting his appearance (cf. 1 John 2:28; 3:2).
  - a) When teaching school, my classroom for several years was in a portable trailer with two classrooms. The other teacher and I agreed that if one of us was delayed, we

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of these words and equivalent expressions for “the day” idea in L. J. Kreitzer, “Parousia,” *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, 858.

<sup>3</sup> Another term, Aramaic in origin, is used in 1 Cor. 16:22 – “. . . Our Lord, come (μαράνα θά, *Marantha*)!”

<sup>4</sup> The verb ἀποκαλύπτω (*apokalyptō*, reveal, disclose) is also used in this sense. But, interestingly, the relevant verses refer to things that accompany the revealing of the Lord, e.g., glory (Rom. 8:18; 1 Pet. 5:1) and salvation (1 Pet. 1:5). The same kind of emphasis is also seen in some verses using the noun ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*) (e.g., Rom. 2:5; 8:19; 1 Pet. 4:13).

<sup>5</sup> For a similar emphasis, see 1 John 2:28-3:3.

<sup>6</sup> The delay of Jesus’ coming has led some to say that James and other writers were mistaken in their statements about its nearness.

would not let the other's students into the room unless the weather was bad. One warm sunny day I was running a little late and discovered as I rounded the corner that my students were in the room. When I asked how they had gotten in, one young man replied that he had climbed through an open window and let the others in. My nearness to the room was both a matter of time (*when* would I arrive?) and space (*how close* was I?). Space may have mattered more than time; either way, my students were unprepared for my sudden arrival ("like a thief ...").

- b) That illustration is not perfect, but perhaps keeps us from putting so much emphasis on the temporal aspect that we ignore the theological reality<sup>7</sup> the NT stresses: the last days are here; their duration is unknown, but he can come any time precisely because we are *already* in the last times.
- 4. Our concern is that since "Christ's return lies close at hand, right at the threshold of the doorway... we ought to behave as people ready for a judgment that has already begun in this life and will culminate quickly at his return."<sup>8</sup>

### III. James's Use of the Expected Coming.

- A. Taken as a whole, James's references – direct and indirect – to the Lord's coming are like those in the rest of the New Testament. He tells them "'to keep hoping when the delay seems interminable, 'to keep trusting when God's timing seems questionable,' and 'to keep working for righteousness when results seem meager.'"<sup>9</sup>
- B. Four points of emphasis stand out.<sup>10</sup>
  - 1. Reversal – as bad as their trials were, especially from the hands of wicked oppressors, things would one day be reversed (1:9-11; 2:5; 4:6, 9-10; 5:1-3).
  - 2. Judgment – all will held accountable for their faith or lack of faith (5:4, 9; cf. 2:12-13; 3:1; 4:12).
  - 3. Salvation – the faithful would be delivered from trials and sin (5:7-8, 11; cf. 1:21; 2:5; 5:15, 19-20).
  - 4. Reward - "the crown of life" awaited the faithful (1:12).

### Conclusion

- 1. The New Testament's big view of last things inspires, reassures, motivates and comforts us as we follow Jesus. It also reminds us that even as we must live out the specifics of our faith in this vale of tears, we do so best when we realize that we are not built for this world.
- 2. Paul pulls it all together in Colossians 3:1-4. Are you seeking the things that are above?

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[www.davidanguish.com](http://www.davidanguish.com)

<sup>7</sup> Seen in the context of discussing the tension between imminence and delay in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, "Passages in the NT which stress the imminence of the Parousia of Jesus Christ may be much more concerned with *theological* relationship between the present reality and future hope than they are with the *chronological* relationship between them" (Kreitzer, 873).

<sup>8</sup> Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 228.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 228, quoting David A. Hubbard, *The Book of James: Wisdom That Works*, 119-20.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 70.