

**“True Patriotism” – James 5:1-6**  
**July 5, 2020 – Outdoor Morning Services**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA**  
**8:45am; 11:00am, 1:15am**  
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**James 5:1-6**

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

This is the word of the Lord.  
*Thanks be to God.*

**Let's pray.**

Yesterday as I drove through the streets of Tacoma, I could just feel the joy in the air. Though this year's fireworks were dampened by the pandemic, people were out celebrating all over the place anyway. I saw American flags flying proudly throughout our city, and people dressed in red, white, and blue stopping to say hello to strangers.

There was also, of course, the delicious aroma of meat on the barbeque or ribs in the smoker. And on top of all of that, we were blessed with a really beautiful day! I admit I was very grateful.

Having lived in and visited other countries around the world, I can say that we are truly blessed as a nation. We enjoy privileges and freedoms that many others have never experienced. We have a beautiful country and we are proud to be Americans.

And there is much to be proud about. Our military forces are without a doubt in my mind the best in the world. Americans everywhere are so grateful for the sacrifice of their time and their lives to fight for our freedom, our country, and our people.

The list could go on and on, but I think that one of the things that shines brightest to the world around us is the way we help each other, how we come together as a nation to help those who are hurting most. Our patriotism shines brightest in moments of crisis like those of 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina.

If you recall, in the midst of those events, Americans put aside all their differences and banded together to support one another, showing tremendous strength and national unity. It was powerful, beautiful and very patriotic.

In many ways, it seems to be an embedded principle in our citizens to help out those in need, those who are less fortunate, and those who have lost it all.

If someone were to ignore a plea for help or refuse to help the victims of 9/11, we would consider that completely unamerican behavior. We would question that person's motives, and we would question their loyalty to our country. Because this is who we are. We help one another and we unite together as one nation in moments of crisis.

Our patriotism is very important to us, and we are fierce defenders of our country. And I would venture to say that as important and fierce as we are about defending our country, when it comes to family, we are even more fierce! There is a lot we would do for our country, but there is even more that we would do for our families.

But there is something even greater than our earthly patriotism and our earthly family. And that is our heavenly citizenship and our heavenly family.

And in this passage of James, this is the foundation for what he says next. In fact, James isn't the only one to speak to this.

Paul explains that, as Christians, we are not to focus on the fact that we are Jew or Greek, American or Canadian. That is not our purpose in this world. We are not first Americans. We are Christians first. And in Christ, we are citizens of a much greater homeland.

This was why it was no difficulty at all for Paul to cast aside his Hebrew background and his valuable Roman citizenship. His greatest loyalty was not to an earthly nation or kingdom, but a heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3.20a).

And Jesus spoke similarly. We hear him regularly saying, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:35). In fact, he took it a step farther and showed that even his family was not of this world. When he was told that his family was looking for him, he responded:

"Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Mt. 12.48-50)

In the gospel, our framework shifts. While we live our lives in this world, and sacrifice and give for our country, we are cognizant of the fact that this our true citizenship and true patriotism belongs first and foremost in heaven and those within the kingdom of heaven. This is our primary citizenship. This is where our loyalty must lie.

All of this is important because it is that heavenly citizenship and brotherhood that is at play in this section of James' letter. James is keenly aware of the fact that many of the Christians who had been dispersed throughout the many different regions were on the run and in deep need of help, and there were many Christians who were betraying their brotherhood and citizenship.

So, James pronounces a fierce judgment on all those who would turn against their brothers and sisters in their time of need.

### **Prophetic Pronouncement**

And this section seems to carry the weight of a sort of prophetic pronouncement of judgment.

In the book of Jonah, God calls Jonah the prophet to deliver a prophecy of judgment and destruction on the city of Nineveh because their evil had come up before God. They were a wicked and pagan city, they tortured their prisoners of war, they committed unspeakable atrocities. So, it is no wonder that they would receive a prophecy of judgment.

But the strange thing is, here James is using prophetic language in v. 1-3 to communicate a similar message on the Christians who had been dispersed. You can hear the judgment in these words:

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.”

Additionally, we see here that the sin of these people had also reached the presence of the Lord through the cries of his people.

v. 4 “Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters **have reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts.**”

By using the phrase, “the Lord of Hosts”, we realize that God is emphasizing his power. He is Master over all the heavenly hosts and angelic armies; he has heard the outcry of the people. He has heard the misery of his people. This is a terrifying thought.

And to put it in perspective, when I hear my beautiful little daughter, **who has me wrapped around her finger**, cry out in pain with tears rolling down her delicate face because one of her brothers has hurt her, you can believe that my protective instincts are immediately stirred up to action and ready to protect her.

But imagine what a fearful thing it would be for the **Lord of all the heavenly hosts** in the universe to hear the cries of his children. Not the cries of an accident, but the cries of those people who had been defrauded and abused. Imagine the wrath of the commander of all the armies of the universe!

But why? Why was God angry? Because they were betraying their brethren. They were betraying their heavenly nation.

### **They were not being patriotic**

I mentioned before that Americans from all over the nation turned to help in 9/11. People were running into burning buildings. Firefighters, police, doctors, civilians – anyone who could help was helping, both at the high point of the crisis and then also in the days, weeks following.

But in our latest pandemic we have seen something else. Some people in leadership, who had allegedly learned about the aggressive nature of the virus and believed it to be like the 1918 pandemic, used their privileged information to sell hundreds of thousands in stocks, knowing that the stock market would take a huge blow.

Rather than warning and helping others, they figured out a way to make an extra buck at the expense of their fellow Americans.

And the Jewish Christians were doing something similar. They were not being truly patriotic or caring toward their brethren. They weren't looking to their heavenly citizenship and they weren't looking out for their brothers. Instead, it appears that they were profiting off their backs and doing so in their greatest moment of need. They were kicking them while they were down!

They were looking out for themselves and their earthly success.

If you look at verse 3, it shows us these ideas succinctly. It reads, "You have laid up treasure in the last days."

### **We read that the accused in these verses had been storing up treasure.**

We should note that we are not talking about the kind of savings you should have as a good steward of your resources. We're talking about storing and hoarding riches at the expense of others during a time of crisis.

And we can draw this conclusion because, as you may recall, the writing of James is thought to be around the time when Stephen was stoned to death for his preaching in Acts 7. Acts reports that on that day there arose a great persecution against the church and the Christians were "were all scattered throughout the regions" (Acts 8:1).

So, when James writes "to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion," we interpret this to mean that he is referring to all of the people of God who were in crisis – dispersed throughout the regions.

And we can imagine that they left a lot behind as they left quickly, fearing for their lives. They had to start over, without their homes, their fields, their possessions, their contacts and most likely some of their family. It must have been a horrible feeling.

In our time overseas, we saw similar scenarios. Many refugees entered the cities we served in. Some had savings, but most had to start over. One lady I met was a respected city official

in her home country, but she was literally scooping and selling charcoal for grills and being paid next to nothing, working very hard hours.

My experience with these refugees and people fleeing one city to live in another makes me think that these Christians brothers and sisters must have been in a very similar situation. Looking for work just about anywhere. Just trying to survive. Scooping charcoal if needed or working in fields.

But the problem is, that when people know you are desperate for work, it is easy to take advantage of them. And it is one thing to be taken advantage of by people you don't know, in a foreign city, but it is a very different thing for your very own people to take advantage of you.

For your very own people to see you in need and desperation and, rather than offering a helping hand, to instead defraud and harm you, is betrayal. And it appears that this is what was happening in James' letter. Christians were defrauding Christians. And the cries of the defrauded were reaching the ears of the Lord of Hosts.

But if there were not enough, they were also storing up treasure.

V. 5 shows us that there were treasures that were being stored up "on the earth" as well.

The Christians had their priorities backward. They were storing the excess wealth they were making off of the backs of their brothers and sisters, and they were hoarding them up in "the last days". They didn't have their eyes on the prize that accompanies *the last days* but were living as though earth was their final destination.

They were not living with heaven or their brethren in mind. And in no uncertain terms James explains that there will be heavy consequences for this type of living.

### **What were those consequences?**

Many of us know the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. I believe this helps us see the issues better.

"There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, **covered with sores**, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.

When both men die, the rich man asks for mercy, because he is suffering in hell, while the poor man is being comforted in heaven, and the rich man is told:

"Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. Luke 16:19

Like the rich man in the story with Lazarus, the rich man in our passage this morning will have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence, fattening his heart while others suffered at their gates, eating well while his brother sat suffering with sores and desiring even a morsel of food that might have fallen from the table.

This is, as we mentioned earlier, unpatriotic. More than that, it is betrayal. It is treason. When, as believers, they had the opportunity to help the broken and hurting, the sick and the weak, they instead turned their back on them. This is the opposite of love. This is to despise and hate. V. 6 says it plainly: “You have condemned and murdered the righteous person and he did not resist you.”

But those actions will not go unnoticed the God who hears the cries of his people.

### **Corroded Treasure**

All the treasures and wealth amassed off the backs of God’s children will not have their intended purpose. Rather than providing them a safety net of security and protection, their riches will have completely rotted, their storages of garments destroyed by moths (v.2). The one thing they thought they could bank on and that could never go bad will be corroded. That gold and silver, which is not supposed to corrode, will be corroded. God will destroy it.

And according to v. 3, that which they thought would provide protection and security, will instead be evidence against them. Their so-called treasures will act as witnesses against him. The consequences are clear. There is no escaping judgment if you live for this world and abandon your true brotherhood. This is a terrifying warning.

### **So how does this teaching apply to us?**

We live in a time of crisis. We are facing a deadly pandemic, an unstable economy, unemployment and underemployment. There are fierce protests and death, there is discrimination and racism, there are people who are incredibly lonely, and others who are struggling with health issues, depression and/or deep anxiety. There are many who are feeling burned out or helpless, and others who are incredibly overwhelmed with everything that is going on right now.

This is our crisis. This is the time that we, as Christians, cannot turn a blind eye to our fellow Christians. We cannot ignore the plight of the poor, the abused, the discriminated or the ignored. We cannot live as though we are individual Christians.

We are one body and we share one citizenship. We are a brotherhood and we need to show our true patriotism by running into the crisis and helping, rather than using it to simply hoard our riches.

So, of first importance, I ask you not to disconnect with this teaching. Don’t assume that “the rich man” is referring to Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates. Don’t tune out and assume that you don’t have room to grow in this area.

I also encourage you not to assume that this is *only* talking about *dollars and cents*.

While we served on the mission field, we would have people ask us all the time if they could be at all useful on the mission field, without extensive education. Yes, education is ideal, and can always be helpful, but I would explain to them that they would be extremely useful to us even just as they were. Having someone who has grown up in the church is already heads and shoulders above the brand-new believers who don't know anything about the Bible.

And you see, this is common among us. We underestimate the gifts we have. We underestimate the wealth we have.

If you've ever had to get renter's or home insurance and put a price on all the things you own, and you follow one of their tools, you'll realize that you are much better off than you thought. If you live in the US, and have any spare change at all, or any food stored away, you are already better off than much of the world.

In addition, our finances are not the only thing we have to give. We have the gift of prayer, the ability to counsel or mentor. We can offer physical labor, technical labor and childcare. You can cook meals, give away resources you don't use anymore, or can bless someone with something they could use more than you. You could sell that car, or you could offer it to someone who needs it. You could make a profit off that TV or computer or phone or give it to someone who needs it.

We have so much at our disposal that could help out a brother and sister in ways that we can't even imagine, and often we hoard those resources.

I think of the many adults in our congregation that have so much to offer younger generations, counsel on so many levels: financial, spiritual, parental, marital and more. You have wisdom to offer those of us who haven't gone through what you've gone through yet. You could sit back and watch us stumble, or you could offer assistance.

Those of you who are less mobile, who are more at risk, or who have other limitations that keep you at home: you can offer prayers like nobody else. You can call and encourage those who are infirmed and broken. You can write letters of encouragement.

The youth in our church are still strong and able to serve in many ways as well: caring for children, doing manual labor, yardwork, window-washing. Visiting the elderly.

We have so many gifts and talents and many ways in which we can serve others who are struggling or hurting around us. You can use your art, your singing, your music, even just your physical presence to help others. Are you hoarding your gifts or your riches to yourself when you know that others in the church need them?

There are many ministries in the church and outside the church that need help. I know our youth ministry would love to know if you would be willing to help in junior high or high school. I know Better English on 6<sup>th</sup> needs additional workers, as do CareNet; Naomi, Ruth and Boaz; Progress House and so many other ministries of our church. If you don't know how you can serve or help, call us at the church. Ask for help and we can give you some ideas! We always need more hands!

And though I won't continue to list off the opportunities, I do want to mention one more.

Your finances. The Lord has given to you generously, and he wants us to give generously. We have a responsibility to steward our finances for God's Kingdom and his people. There is no point in hoarding and massing up treasures on earth in these last days. There are people in our midst who are needy, and many are not going to ask. They will not resist you for taking advantage of a situation.

It could be that they may be proud, embarrassed, or simply feel ashamed or unworthy. They might not realize how much they actually need help!

I want to encourage you to think of this when you come across this sort of situation.

They don't deserve it. They are unworthy. **Because none of us deserve anything. We are all unworthy.** There will always be someone else who may need something more than you do.

If some family or person is on your heart or mind, offer tangible ways to help. Please don't say, "Let me know how I can help you." Don't put the onus on them. Put it on yourself. Get creative on how you can help without putting them in the awkward place to tell you how to help.

And if you are being offered help, and you could use that help, don't reject the Lord's provision for you. If God is providing for you through his church, do not reject him!

When we would go hiking into the Andes Mountains to share the gospel to people in different towns and mountainsides, we'd invariably come across someone very poor who out of the thankfulness of their hearts would offer us whatever they had on hand. They would offer us corn, potatoes, and sometimes even a live chicken or a guinea pig.

At first, I would turn them down, but one day my dad corrected me and taught me an important lesson. He explained that it was a blessing for them to give us that guinea pig. It was a generous gift on their part. And to reject their offer was to say that we were better than they were, that we didn't need them.

Brothers and sisters, if someone offers you help that you need, don't reject it. Don't be too proud to receive from the hand of the Lord. After all, these resources are the Lord's resources for his church. For his body. He has chosen to provide for us in this way.

**And** on the other hand, if you only have a small token guinea pig to offer, offer it. You can also bless those who are better off than you financially. It is not just the financially poor who need help.

We all need the support and love of the brethren. We are a body and we support one another in different ways.

Brothers and sisters, we must be true to our citizenship. We must be true to our family. We cannot love God if we don't love his children.

Whoever “does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

And I remind you that loving someone requires more than just saying, “We are praying for you.”

James 2:15-16 says, “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”

We need to show our love of God by showing tangible effort.

### **Hope in Christ**

Earlier, in the children's message, I talked about the kid who forgot to take his lunch to school and ended up receiving food donations from the other kids that made up a lunch that went above and beyond what anyone could have expected. My wife recounts that day and how she remembered feeling jealous of the kid who had forgotten his lunch!

And it made me think, what would it look like if we took James' message to heart and put it into practice at this time of crisis?

What if we as a church body, when presented with a need, not only met it, but gave toward it above and beyond! In fact, so much so, that the neediest person in the church was the most blessed. So much so, that the rest of us would long to be in their shoes because they received such an abundant offering! Wouldn't that be wonderful? Imagine, with our church resources, and our ability to help others, we could turn someone's life completely around.

We could take someone in the direst situation and lift them up and help them succeed. Can you imagine what an observing world would say about us? What people would think when they see Christians loving their brothers so sacrificially and generously?

If people would see the love of Jesus spilling over in abundance to our brethren because we don't cling to this world, or its wealth or its sense of patriotism, we would make a tremendous impact in them.

This is what we are called to. To love God and love our neighbors. To give as God has given to us.

How wonderful it would be if instead of the cries of the defrauded, the Lord of Hosts would hear cries of jubilee and celebration!

Brothers, in the same way that our Lord saw us in that burning building of condemnation and sin, and rather than turning away, gave up his life on our behalf, may we lay down our lives for our brethren.

Jesus knew our poor estate, he knew our poor condition, our certain judgment, and he made us rich in him, by laying down his life to make us guiltless, righteous, holy and pure.

Only because of him do we escape the judgment pronounced in this chapter. Only in him do we all receive an inheritance that is abundant, overflowing, and more magnificent than anything we could ever imagine.

### **In Conclusion**

As we reflect on our 4<sup>th</sup> of July activities and the fact that God has blessed us with a wonderful nation, may we also remember that, even greater than that, he has blessed us with a citizenship in heaven that is even sweeter than anything we could have on this earth.

May we turn our eyes heavenward and release our grip of all the treasures we have in this world, giving them freely to those in need even as we have received them freely. For this is the evidence and fruit of the man or woman who has placed their faith in Jesus.

Amen.