

Hold On By Looking Up

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[0 : 00] James. Not you, James. The other James.

! Alright, here's our subject tonight.! Hold on by looking up. Hold on by looking up. I won't say anything about the title. I think that kind of describes what this particular passage is about. We're really going to just be looking at two verses, as you probably have already seen in your notes.

And so, maybe, though I won't make any promises, we'll get out of here a little early. But this passage, James chapter 5, verses 7 and 8, is not a new subject.

We're not, you know, again, there's one charge against James or the letter of James that I don't think is necessarily true. And that is that James is just kind of scattered.

[1 : 11] It's kind of like a shotgun approach. And he's got this subject and he shoots another one and then there's another one. You just kind of scatter all around different themes and such. There is some continuity.

It's not always easy to see it. But in the case of this particular passage, it is easy to see if you understand the purpose of the word therefore.

And so, therefore always connects what is about to be said with what has already been said. So, we know that the same subject is in play here in these verses.

Same subject as we discussed last time out of verses 1 through 6. Now, the subject of these verses, or verses 1 through 6, if you will remember, and if you were here last week, the subject was riches.

Riches, and specifically the dangers of ordering one's life around the desire for riches or for wealth.

[2 : 15] Wealth itself is not evil, not sinful. The, you know, the accumulation of material things is not in and of itself sinful.

It's very relative. The word riches, wealth, remember what we studied last week, very relative term. You know, one person can be wealthy, you know, in this country, or poor in this country, be wealthy in another country.

So, it's very relative. But it is the desire, the ordering of an entire life and focus toward the gaining of wealth or material things and the kind of the mentality of not only gaining it, but keeping it, hoarding it.

And that's why James begins in verse 1, Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. I'm not talking about, you know, the miseries of just the simple fact of having money.

It is this inordinate desire to have it that leads to misery. And so, that's, you know, obviously what we, if you remember what we studied in verses 1 through 6.

[3 : 30] So, James' subject is the same, but the audience is different. The audience, his audience is not the same. And so, we're still on the same subject, but now we're really talking about a different group of people.

Kind of the other side of the coin. Verses 1 through 6 is addressed toward those who are hoarding wealth and by doing so, hurting others. But then, these verses, verses 7 and 8, are those who are being hurt.

The audience is those who are being hurt by the people hoarding wealth. And really, it's much broader than just simply wealthy people, but it's a worldliness in the church.

And worldliness that Christians have to endure in this life. And the effects of worldliness, the oppression that comes from worldliness.

All right. So, the teaching of these two verses is directed toward those who are oppressed and persecuted for their desire to live a biblical Christian life.

[4 : 46] Now, let me explain or focus in on biblical Christian life. A lot of people who are living what they would call the Christian life.

A lot of people who would call themselves Christian and want to be numbered among that group. And in a lot of thinking today, the word Christian is a pretty broad term.

Includes a whole lot of people that we would not necessarily include. Well, I'm just talking about Christian in the secular kind of use of the word in our culture today.

We're talking about true biblical Christianity that is defined by the Bible. And I'm not going to go into all that that means.

The entire Bible describes what a true biblical Christian is. How that one is saved to begin with. How that one lives and the hopes that he or she has and so forth.

[5 : 53] All of that based upon the Bible and not based upon Webster or some other definition of Christianity. All right. So, we're talking about true biblical Christian Christians or the true biblical Christian life.

If you live a true biblical Christian life, you will experience oppression from a world, from this world. And so, that's the subject here in the verse.

So, James' counsel then to those who are being oppressed, and that would include at some point or another, all those who desire to live a biblical Christian life, is counsel to us who are being oppressed by the ungodly rich in and out of the church, is hold on and keep looking up.

That's his counsel. Hold on and keep looking up. Or as he put it, be patient. Some versions have persevere. Or at least one does.

Establish your hearts. Or strengthen your hearts. For the coming of the Lord is at hand. It's near. So, there's where I get the title.

[7 : 05] Hold on. Keep looking up. Keep looking up. And this is his counsel to those who are oppressed by the worldly. All right.

So, what to do when oppressed by worldliness? That's what we're going to consider. And I just have two points. I tried awfully hard to get a third.

But, you know, I'd have to add something to the scripture. And, you know, just something that's unbalanced about a two-point message. I was taught in seminary.

Never have a two-point sermon. Got to have a three-pointer. But just two points, okay? I am kind of tongue-in-cheek with that. You know what I'm saying? Although, I think you'll notice, very rarely will I have a two-point sermon.

It's going to be three or more. Not too many more, hopefully. All right. Number one, look to the Lord. This is point number one. Look to the Lord.

[8 : 07] I mean, you could guess that one. Uh-oh. I forgot to change my title down there at the bottom. You just disregarded that. That was last week. Okay. Okay.

Look to the Lord. But anyway, that's look, hold on, and look up. So we're going to start with the look up first. Look to the Lord.

We do not look to our government and or community, do we? Now, that's not to say that we don't look to our government for certain things, things that we really believe government was founded to do, you know, to protect our nation and so forth.

I think our government now does way more than it was ever intended to do or meant to do or is healthy to do. But that's a debate for a different kind of forum than this here tonight.

We don't get into politics too much. But we don't look to the government. Now, we also look to our community in a sense. I mean, we have a Christian community. We do depend upon one another and need one another.

[9 : 24] We're not talking about, you know, just being so heavenly minded, you know, that you're not connected with anybody. But when it comes to the long haul, the overall life as a biblical Christian, we look to the Lord every day.

And when it comes to the oppression, we begin to experience persecution that we can experience at the hand of even some who might even be in the church, but especially out in the world.

Then we look to the Lord for that. And this is what James is teaching us. And we don't look to the government or to our community because injustice toward biblical Christianity is on the rise in our nation.

I think there probably would have been a time when, you know, a few decades ago, when we would not necessarily sense the dangers of depending upon a government.

Because, you know, things have changed. And we're living in a time, and it's rapidly becoming worse, when injustice towards biblical Christians is increasing.

[10:43] We hear about it more and more every day. I think I would add also that we are a bit insulated from that because of where we live here in middle America and Oklahoma, you know, conservative and churches on every corner and some really good ones like this one.

And we're kind of insulated from that. But it's not so in many parts of our nation that injustice that is perpetrated against believers is on the rise.

And some of it even sanctioned, even perpetrated by government officials. Laws that were designed to protect religious freedom are beginning to exclude biblical Christianity.

Isn't that amazing? I mean, a nation that was founded upon freedom, freedom for all religions, and that's how we began and so forth, fast becoming a nation where there's freedom of religion for everybody but biblical Christians.

And it's the design of Satan, of course. And I would add to that since the Constitution, our Constitution is becoming more open to interpretation these days and revision even.

[12:15] I mean, now, you know, to many of our judges and legislatures, the Constitution is kind of a living document.

You've heard that phrase before. So it's not set. There's room to interpret, room to maybe judge based upon and pass laws based upon interpretations of it.

And since that is the case, then the judicial branch of our government is becoming less Christian friendly. There's no doubt about it. It's starting way back when prayer was taken out of the school, when abortion was legalized, and Ten Commandments were taken down from public places.

And we hear about that all the time. It's becoming more and more that way. And these things are being done because judges are ruling that it can be done.

And they can only do that if they kind of play loosey-goosey with the Constitution. All right, I'm not trying to get on a soapbox here, but I'm just trying to fortify the reality that we don't look to the government.

[13:25] We look to the Lord. I add another one, political correctness, which is a phrase we hear all the time, has clearly judged biblical Christianity not only incorrect, but even a detriment to society.

We need to be able to acknowledge this. And we know this is true. Even though we may not experience much of that right here where we live, it's happening all around our nation.

And it's becoming worse. And very fast it's becoming much worse. All right, the Bible then promises that biblical Christians will suffer at the hands of the unbelieving world.

So I'm not saying that James is, you know, trying to encourage us that these things that are happening, oppression, persecution, ought not to be happening, and that maybe we could take some steps to keep this kind of thing from happening.

No, the Bible, on the contrary, promises that we will suffer at the hands of an unbelieving world. And I have several verses of Scripture that deal with this.

[14:43] In the world you have tribulation. That's short and sweet. Not so sweet, but pretty concise. In the world you have tribulation.

You have it. Not may have it, but will have it. Acts 14.22, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. That's the way God has designed it.

Some of His purpose in that we can explain and understand here if we're willing to. Our own personal maturity and growth. Our need for faith. And how this glorifies God.

But I think even the purposes behind God allowing us to suffer go way beyond this life and on into eternity. Things that we don't really yet even understand.

2 Timothy 1.8. Join with me in suffering for the gospel. All right. Paul, we'll just join with you there. That's encouraging. Right? Motivational speaker.

[15:44] Join with me in suffering for the gospel. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

There's no ifs, ands, or buts about that. 1 Peter 4.12, beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing.

As though some strange thing were happening to you. I think a lot of believers, by the way, myself included, have a hard, especially in America, have a hard time breaking out of the mentality that suffering equates, I mean, that equates into, I must not be living right.

Or God is mad at me. Or God, you know, God is angry. And so we say, and so when we examine ourselves, say, I don't have any, there's no reason why God should be angry with me.

I'm all fessed up and living the best I can. Why would God let this happen? You know, so this is strange that this is happening to me. And Peter says, don't think this is a strange thing.

[16:53] We might even kind of think in this way because of the country we live in, you know. So, you know, so persecution comes. We think it's not supposed to happen in America.

You know, this happens in China and Iran and Iraq and places in the Muslim world and so forth. It's not supposed to happen in America. It's not supposed to happen in Oklahoma.

And so, again, you know, Peter says, don't think that it's a strange thing. But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing. So, the more you suffer with Christ, the more you rejoice.

I don't think all of us or maybe any of us have totally bought into that yet like we should. But that's what God says. And it's a glorious thing to begin to experience it.

The biblical promise of a Christian utopia on this earth will not be fulfilled until Jesus comes.

[17:55] There's not going to be a Shangri-La here in this world. We're not progressing and getting better and more Christian and more spiritual.

And that's never going to happen. Some kind of Christian utopia. I think at one time we thought America was a Christian utopia. Well, actually, it never has been.

Even though persecution was much less maybe years ago and we were more moral, more spiritual, more family value oriented and so forth.

But it was not a Christian utopia. That's never going to happen until Jesus comes. All right? Verse 7 says, Be patient, brethren, until. Until what?

A Bible-believing president will make all things right? Huh? You think we can elect somebody into office to make this happen for us that we would have a Christian utopia?

[18:59] Absolutely not. Or a conservative Congress will legislate away all Christian persecution? They'll just pass laws. We'll get Congress to make us more free as believers and we'll become more Christian as a nation.

Or maybe looking at the other branch of the government, a right-leaning. I'm playing to the conservative crowd here. But a right-leaning Supreme Court will uphold your constitutional right to practice biblical Christianity without hindrance.

So we need to be patient until that happens. Is that ever going to happen? No. No, it's never going to happen.

Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. I know we want more than that. We want something more immediate.

To relieve us from the difficulty of really living a truly biblical Christian life. We want some answers for that now.

[20:08] We want some way open for us now and some freedom to do that now. We want that kind of life without oppression and persecution and sacrifice. We'd like to have some answer for that now.

And so the reason we become discouraged is because we don't get that now. God gives us strength and gives us victory. But a lot of that comes through how we look at things.

And we're to look up to the coming of the Lord. He may come any day. But that's our focus, the coming of the Lord. And that is James' counsel to us as believers.

When things are tough, we just keep our focus on the coming of the Lord. And verse 8 is almost a repetition of the idea. Stayed a little bit different.

Be patient because. Because what? Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity are going to turn this country back to conservative right? Right? Right?

[21:16] Or our Christian radio personalities. You can name some of your favorites. You know. And preachers. Some of the more popular, famous, really great leaders and great preachers that we have today.

They're going to bring our culture back to biblical morality. That's what we need to be patient for.

We're just waiting for that to happen. Right? Or our Christian authors are going to write just the right kind of books that are going to change America's thinking about the Bible.

And we just have to. That perfect book hasn't been written yet. That's just going to really inspire the people of our nation to turn back to God.

That's just what we need. And so we need to be patient until that happens. Maybe that author is sitting in here. Yeah. Start writing. Yeah.

Well, actually, the answer to all that is no, of course. And be patient. James says, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Some versions have it near.

[22 : 31] The coming of the Lord is near. Do you really think it is? Or do we just hope so? Do we hope so?

And both, yeah. But the reality is we don't know. The when of it. It's just always at hand. Always near. And in God's perspective, you know, a few million years is near to Him.

But it's near in the sense that we're living in the time, the last days. How long those last days are, we don't know.

We've been in the last days for over 2,000 years. The Bible talks about the end time, the last days. Talking about the time of history from the coming of Jesus to when He comes again.

We're living in those times. We don't know when, but we can say this without any debate. We're nearer now than ever before. And tomorrow we'll be even nearer.

[23 : 34] The next day and so forth. But the idea is to place your hope in that. And you're not a hope so, but a confident hope. That the Lord's coming and His coming is at hand.

It's near. We ought to be always living in the light of that reality. And in fact, the Bible even teaches we ought to order our lives in such a way, knowing that Jesus may come today.

That His coming is near. A sure, and we'll end with this statement, then we'll go on to the next point. A sure and constant, it just kind of wraps it up.

A sure and constant hope in the coming of the Lord must be the mark of a Christian living in a world hostile toward Christianity.

Hostile toward Christ. That must be what marks us. That we always have this constant, sure, indestructible hope in the coming of Christ.

[24 : 42] And that when He comes, we know when He comes, He's going to make everything right. Everything right. I'm not talking about conservative right. He's talking about everything right. He's going to make everything right.

And that's our constant and sure hope. Number two, live to the Lord. So look to the Lord. Live to the Lord. We'll put these kind of backward.

And so James tells us how to live in an anti-Christian culture. And that's the culture we're living in. I mean, it really is. Maybe not as anti-Christian as some other countries, certainly not. But fast becoming more and more anti-Christian. Certainly very godless and Christless begins there and then even anti-Christian.

First of all, have a long fuse. Have a long fuse. He says be patient.

[25 : 57] In fact, he says it twice. Verse 7, be patient. Verse 8, be patient. The Greek word is makrothumeo. And it's two words put together.

Makro in the Greek means long. It means long. Makro here would be large. I mean, that's usually how you think of large or the bigger picture, macro picture.

But that comes from the Greek word makro. And it means long. And thumeo comes from thumos, which means anger. In fact, it's a very strong word.

It's an outburst of rage and anger. And so, what's he saying? Have a long fuse.

Because, you know, when, as a believer who desires to live biblically, to live for the Lord and live in the way that God desires us to live beforehand.

[27 : 01] And when we face those who oppress us and persecute us and do hateful things toward us, the tendency would be to get upset, to get angry.

And so, to live to the Lord means you have a long fuse. Long fuse. Don't be easily angered.

Second, have a long focus.

A long focus. How far out is your focus? Till the Lord comes. Coming of the Lord, verse 7. Coming of the Lord is at hand. That's speaking of our vision, our focus, how far we look out.

So, when we're facing persecution or oppression because of our biblical Christian values and life commitment, then we need to keep our focus right.

Keep our eyes. Take that long view. Set our focus on the finish line. The finish of this life. Finish line being when Jesus comes.

[28 : 16] Get God. And I meant to put where I got this quote. I can't remember. Get God and eternity into the picture before letting defeat and discouragement overcome you.

Always get God and eternity in the picture. We're just passing through here. And all that we face is temporary. And so, we need to keep God and eternity and His plan He has for us in eternity. Keep that always in the picture before we let defeat and discouragement overcome us. Third, have a long faith.

Long faith. Establish your hearts. Or strengthen your hearts. Verse 8. Then, He uses an illustration of this farmer.

Jonathan, read that. Part of it. The farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. Being patient about it until they perceive the earth being delayed right. Okay.

[29 : 32] This is an illustration. And He uses illustration to fortify this truth about our faith, our trust. And so, the farmer, he plants his crop.

He cultivates the crop. And then, he waits for the rain. Now, this is a very simple view. Now, we've come up with ways, of course, in our modern day farming techniques to irrigate and all kinds of things like that.

But even that is not a foolproof. We need God to do some things and we're not going to have a good crop. And I've always said that farmers probably know more about faith than any other occupation.

Especially in the days in which Jesus walked the earth. Farmers in this day. And the people would have understood this illustration. So, he plants his crop. Cultivates it. Does all that he's supposed to do with that.

But then, beyond that, he's dependent, totally dependent upon God for the harvest. For a good harvest. To bring the rains and so forth. So, he uses that illustration. And so, here's the connection.

[30 : 40] Just as the farmer trusts God to send the rains, we must trust God to send his son to make everything right. So, we have that long faith.

Our faith is not just for the moment. Our faith stretches out, out into, I don't know how far in the future. Faith, a trust that God's son will come.

And he will reconcile all things. And correct all things. And take us unto himself.

And it will be a wondrous day. And we ought to keep that in view. And so, to establish or strengthen your hearts means to live in the light of eternity.

And not just for the moment. You live for the moment. And you will always be discouraged. You live for the moment. And you will always experience defeat.

[31 : 43] Because we're not allowing ourselves to see beyond that. And see what God has to do with all of this. And what God is doing in the moment.

Because if you're a born-again believer, everything that happens in the moment comes from, comes through, a sovereign God who has a purpose for us.

He's teaching us. And so, yeah, even suffering is a part of that. And even healthy for us. Thank you.