

I Believe... So Now What?
(Week 9)
James 4:11 - 5:6
"Haters, Heathen, and Hoarders"

Introduction

"Trust in The LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding: in ALL your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear The LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." **Proverbs 3:5-8 (NIV, emphasis added)**

As I was studying this week to prepare the message, I thought about the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. It is a time of year, when we stop to count our many blessings and give thanks to The LORD for all that He has done for us. As we have been going through the book of *James*, hopefully we have been able to spend some time in serious personal reflection as to the many things in our lives that are not pleasing to God. We should respond by asking His forgiveness and grace to enable us to live in a way that is more pleasing to Him. After all, God has certainly blessed each of us. Has He not? Our response to such blessings should not only be prayers of thanksgiving, but lives lived with "thanks-living". In other words, we should live in such a way that we are a blessing to God.

The "sermon" that James has preached for us all is incredibly well organized. He begins by telling us how we "should" be living, if we are truly God's children. Now I don't know about you, but I have found myself being convicted over and over again by his words. James has forced me to take a good long "look in the mirror" (**James 1:23-25**), and quite frankly, I don't really like much of what I have seen. Can I get a witness? He tells us that we must **"Always rejoice in our trials (1:2); Pray in faith and never doubt (1:5-8); Don't give in to temptation (1:13-18); Control my temper (1:19-20); Always obey The Word (1:21-25); Control my tongue (1:26; 3:1-12); Look out for those less fortunate, showing no favoritism (1:27,-2:13); and Live what I claim to believe by doing good works (2:14-26).** He tells us that we must live our lives directed by The Spirit of God and not to be deceived by the "spirit of this world" (**3:13-4:6**). And finally, he says that we must humble ourselves and draw near to God in order to receive His grace for all our sins (**4:6-10**).

Now, after all of that, if anyone is still able to look around and judge the lives of others, then you haven't been listening close enough! You see, when we truly examine ourselves in the sight of a Holy God, we won't feel like looking around at the faults of those around us. This is why Jesus admonishes us:

"Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye, but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye? Or how can you say, 'My friend, let me take the speck out of your eye', when you don't see the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye." **Matthew 7:3-5**

The simple truth is, we can't ever help anyone else in their walk of faith unless we first, examine our own walk of faith. Makes perfect sense doesn't it? James thought so too! This is why he speaks of judging others only after he has made us take a long, hard look at ourselves. Then he tells us:

"Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Any one who defames or judges a fellow believer, defames and judges The Law. If you judge The Law, you are not a doer of The Law but a judge." **James 4:11**

The word that James uses for criticize actually means "slander". While we are commanded to correct others when we see them commit sin, we are **not** to run them down and ruin their reputation. James reminds us here of "The Royal Law", which says **"Love your neighbor as yourself"**. You cannot claim to obey this command and then slander your neighbor. This is what James means when he says to do so is to "defame and judge The Law".

What every Christian must do is to remember that God is over everything. We are not to ever try and take His place on the throne. Rather, we must “acknowledge Him in all things”. If God is truly to be God over all, then His sovereignty is to rein over every aspect of our lives. He is, therefore, uniquely qualified to be the final Decider, Guider, and Provider, in all that we do. In verses **4:11 - 5:6**, James make this very clear. It is a message to the “Haters, the Heathen, and the Hoarders” to turn it all over to God. He is the only One who actually knows what He is doing! So if we are to be truly blessed, we must **“in all ways submit to Him” (Proverbs 3:6).**

Haters (4:11-12)

“Don’t criticize one another, brothers and sisters. Anyone who defames or judges a fellow believer defames and judges The Law. If you judge The Law, you are not a doer of The Law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and Judge Who is able to save and destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?” **James 4:11-12**

First, let me begin by saying that James is NOT telling us to ignore sin. We, as Christians, are commanded to rebuke the sin of our brothers and sisters in Christ. What James is saying is that we must not criticize one another. The word that he uses (translated “criticize”) is *Katalaleo* in the Greek, meaning to “slander”. We are to approach those who sin in love, in hopes of correcting the error, rather than gossiping about them or trying to “ruin their good name”. Churches are filled with slanderers. It seems that there are a great deal of people out there who believe that they can build themselves up by tearing others down. This has never been God’s way. God longs to restore people, not write them off. He holds off His judgement as long as possible, in order to give the sinner ample time for repentance.

“The LORD does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.” **2 Peter 3:9**

Of course, we know that there are some people who will never come to repentance. *The Bible* plainly speaks of this. Those who refuse the grace of God will be condemned and judged by God. But we are not to judge them. That, my friends, is far above our pay grade! Or as James says:

“But who are you to judge your neighbor?”

When we are “haters” (to coin a popular term), we are passing judgment. James is in essence saying, “Just who do you think you are?” Only God is qualified to do such things. Don’t be a “hater”! Leave the judging to God, for He is far better qualified to do so. At the beginning of this sermon, I quoted from **Proverbs 3:6** that says: **“In ALL ways submit to Him.”**

What this verse is telling us is that we must **in all things** “let God **BE** God”! James wants us to understand that God is perfectly capable of doing what needs to be done, when it needs to be done. He doesn’t need my help to administer His justice. There are many things that we have been commanded to do, but settling the score for God is absolutely not one of them! He can pass judgment just fine without our input. When we slander others and “write them off”, we are in fact usurping God’s authority. I know sometimes it is difficult for us to just stand by and watch, but just remember, no one will get away with wrongdoing.

Now I love Westerns. I could sit for hours and watch old John Wayne movies. One of the things that I like most about cowboy movies is there are “good guys” and “bad guys”, and it’s usually pretty simple to figure out who is who (I don’t need any more “complicated” in my life, I have enough already). As the plot develops, you can’t help but feel a touch of “righteous anger” for the villain. Usually by the end of the movie you are anxiously awaiting the big “shootout” scene where that the bad guy (hopefully) will finally get what’s coming to him.

You see, it is quite natural for us to want justice. But here’s the problem. When we take matters into our own hands, then we leave out the only One who is truly capable of administering real justice.

God alone is qualified to pass judgment. And, if we have truly examined ourselves (**James 1-4**), we must honestly admit that we deserve some “justice” for all the wrongs that we have done. But, because we have repented of our sins, God has given us GRACE instead (**James 4:6**)! Therefore, we should long for others to receive His grace as well. Should we not? So, let's allow God to be God. Let's submit to him in all things, including the administration of justice. Let us not speak evil of others when they sin, but instead, try to warn any who will listen and turn in repentance (**Galatians 6:1**), and just leave it at that. The Judge Who sees everything can take it from there. Let God be God.

Heathen (4:13-17)

“Come now, you who say, ‘Tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like a vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. Instead, you should say, ‘If The LORD wills, we will live and do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it.” **James 4:13-17**

Again, James is saying “in All ways submit to Him”. The heathen of this world believe that they are the “captains of their own destiny”, so to speak, but the born again child of God should know better. For it is God that gives us our every breath. Without Him, we can do nothing (**John 15**). We are but a “vapor that vanishes” and unless The LORD wills it, all our plans and schemes are in vain. James is reminding us of this fact. There is an old saying; “Man plans, and God laughs”. This pretty much sums up how much actual control that we have over our lives.

We must, in order to be blessed, submit our everyday lives to God. Some have mistakenly thought that James is simply telling us to add, “If the LORD wills” to everything **we** decide to do. As if there is some kind of “magic formula” to getting God to go along with us. We hear well intentioned people say things like this all the time, “I’ll be there in the morning... LORD willing”. But, what James is actually instructing us to do has a little more to it than that. He is telling us that we should surrender our every decision to God and to find His will BEFORE we make any plans of our own. David, in **Psalms 37:4** says it like this:

“Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart’s desires.”

Again, this is a verse that is taken out of context by many, who want it to say, “If you love God, He will give you everything you want”. But this is NOT what this verse means. It means that if we make ourselves content with God, then all He chooses to give us, will become all that we desire. You see, it's not about getting to do or receive what we want, it's about letting God be God and letting Him give us what He believes is best. All my life, I have wanted to live in Alaska (or so I have thought). Ever since I was a boy, I dreamed of the Alaskan wilderness. Truth be told, I've never even been there! But I've read about it, and I've seen thousands of photographs. These have somehow convinced me that life in Alaska would be the perfect place for me. But, as a matter of complete honesty, I have absolutely no idea if I would be happy there or not.

If I were to come home one evening and say to Sandi, “Tomorrow, we are moving to Alaska... God willing”, I sincerely doubt that it would be God's will (nor Sandi's for that matter). God has seen fit for me to be the pastor of a church in Greeneville, Tennessee. I know for a fact, that this is His will for me at this particular point in my life, so Alaska... is out of the question. I do not get to decide such things for myself, for you see... I'm not the one in charge of such things. I must let God be God. “In ALL ways submit to Him.” The heathens believe that they make their own choices, but the Believer knows better! God knows more about what I need than I could ever possibly hope to imagine. If He doesn't want me in Alaska, then I do not belong there. And hear this, you will never be able to find any lasting happiness outside of God's will. I am convinced that true happiness can only be found, when you let God choose the path for you:

“In all ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

To know what God's will is for you, and to choose to do otherwise... is sin (**James 4:17**). Don't brag about your plans. Don't try to take control of your own destiny. Seek the will of God for your life, and submit to His leading and watchful care. You will never be sorry. Don't order your life as the heathen do. In all ways... submit to Him. Before you choose it... pray about it. Don't try to get God to come around to your way of thinking, but instead submit yourself to His way of thinking.

Hoarders (5:1-6)

"Come now, you rich people, weep and wail over the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth has rotted and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have stored up treasure in the last days. Look! The pay that you withheld from the workers who mowed your fields cries out, and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of The LORD of Hosts. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and have indulged yourselves. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous, who does not resist you."
James 5:1-6

There is nothing wrong with having wealth. Abraham, by all accounts, was a very wealthy man. God had blessed him with riches, but Abraham's wealth wasn't the most important thing in his life. God was. The person that lives to gain wealth above all else and with no regard to those he uses to get it, will stand before God and be judged as a miserable wretch.

At this time of the year, we are reminded of God's blessings upon us. We should, in turn, use what He has blessed us with to bless others. What a sad testimony it will be for those who loved money above all else to have their own wealth testify against them on the day of judgment (**vs. 3**). James says that those who stockpile riches but refuse to help others will have their "moldy old gold" bearing witness to their selfishness. James reminds us that we are living in "the last days" (The church age), where the focus must be on loving others into the kingdom, rather than building kingdoms for ourselves. Are you using your fortune to reach the lost, or are you using it to indulge yourself? Take a look around... there is suffering everywhere. Maybe you can't help everyone, but you can certainly help **someone!** Don't be a hoarder. Be a grateful sharer.

James also warns against those who gain wealth by taking advantage of others. God the Judge sees it all. According to Jewish Law, day laborers were to be paid their wages at the end of each day (**Deuteronomy 24:15**). This was because they were very poor and needed the money to support their families. For them to wait for the money meant going hungry. God commanded that we not take advantage of the poor... not ever. He will judge those who gain wealth by treating others unjustly. The child of God must be fair in their dealings with others. Why? Because in ALL things, we must submit to Him.

God has truly blessed us all. In this time of Thanksgiving, let us not only stop and remember Who has given us these blessings, but let us bring honor to Him by living in such a way that we are a blessing to Him, and to those around us. Don't be a Hater, a Heathen, or a Hoarder. Remember Who gave His life to save you, and live like you have been saved! In **all** things acknowledge Him, allow Him to direct your paths, and you shall live a life of Thanks-living!

And All of God's people said... TRUTH!!!