

James 5 • The coming of the Lord is at hand

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We've been making our way through the book of James here on Sunday morning, and we are on the final chapter today. So have your Bibles there. We're going to read through the chapter and then we are going to ask the Lord to open our hearts. It goes like this:

¹Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³Your 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. ⁴Behold, 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. ⁵You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

¹²But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be

healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

¹⁹My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."
(ESV)

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we get into the scripture this morning, we pray for your grace and guidance. We pray for understanding and insight. We pray that you'd help us to lay hold of the truth that you want to speak to each heart. And we ask that you would speak to us clearly. For we pray it in the name of Jesus Christ, our savior, amen.

You have to know that these first 6 verses of chapter 5 are kind of a departure from the way things normally go in a typical epistle or letter written by one of the apostles. Because James really kind of diverts from his audience. And he begins to speak to those who really aren't going to ever read this letter. But he begins to speak an almost prophetic warning, if you will, toward the ungodly who have allowed their wealth to corrupt their hearts and minds in terms of how they treat and oppress other people.

James is using these verses to sound a rather clear warning, prophetic though it may be, of the coming judgment. And you'll notice here that he doesn't really even offer any kind of a path of repentance. This isn't a word given to people in the church where he's saying, 'Hey, you need to repent of this.' He's really just kind of pronouncing judgment.

And so it's one of those things you have to just kind of take as him speaking prophetically toward the unbelieving and ungodly world. We read these opening verses of the chapter, and we're just reminded of the danger that money can bring into our lives. And it's one of those reminders that we really need to get from time to time.

Because, if you read through the scripture, particularly I'm taking the book of Proverbs. If you just go through the book of Proverbs and jot down every time a reference is made to money, you will see warning after warning after warning that is given about the corrupting, well, the potential corrupting influence of money.

Now, that's not to say that it corrupts everybody. And I know you're thinking to yourself, well, it won't be me. Because we know and understand that there have been many people and there are people in the Word of God and the scriptures who were very well to do financially and yet maintained a very close and devotional relationship to the Lord.

But that doesn't negate the fact that the Bible sounds many warnings about money and the desire. Remember, money is not evil in and of itself. It's what we do with it, and particularly when we long for it. And we have to be reminded of this as Americans, because I don't know about you, but I've been raised in a culture that really directs me toward wealth. And paints this picture of it that's pretty positive as kind of the thing that can get you out of most issues and give you the best life and on and on and on and on.

And yet here are just a couple of warnings. First of all, from Ecclesiastes. I love this passage:

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NIV)

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.

And that's an interesting verse, isn't it? We deceive ourselves, we delude ourselves into thinking if I just had this much money or if I just made this much or earned this much or won this much. If I ever won the lottery, then I'd be happy and I'd be satisfied and I could go about my life and . . . yeah, no.

If the heart is there, if the heart is longing for it, then you'll never have enough. You'll never be satisfied with what you have. One of the interesting ways to know this is if I were to pass out a piece of paper to every single one of you and ask you to write down the amount of money that you need to make to be satisfied, it would be vastly different across this whole thing.

And some of you would write down an amount of money that some others of here are actually getting. But they would write down a higher amount. We are always thinking that wealthy is somewhere beyond where we are. And yet the fact of the matter is, I've mentioned to you many times, in terms of wage earners, we're the top in the world.

We are the top. Even though you might think to yourself, well, I don't make that much money. Yeah. Well, you need to take a trip around the world. And check out some of the people who live on 25 dollars a week, for example, or

something like that. So the love of money is one of those difficult things, the desire for money.

Paul talks about it:

1 Timothy 6:10 (ESV)

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

He says, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.*" And then he reminds us that, "*It is through this craving*" this desire, this lust for money, "*that some have*" in fact "*wandered*" "*from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*" That word also means griefs.

They've brought a lot of grief into their lives simply because of their love of money. The love of money and the corrupting influence that it has on people, and the oppression that comes to others because of that corrupting influence, that's been going on for a long long time.

It was happening in Bible times. It's happening today. And it creates a very challenging situation. And it did for the people to whom James was writing. He was writing to Jews who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. These people were suffering not only because of the corrupt wealthy, but they were also suffering at the hands of their own countrymen.

A lot of the Jews were persecuting the Christian Jews because they had come to faith in Jesus Christ. And then they were suffering from Rome. Of course, most all the Jews were suffering related to Rome. But still that was the suffering that was going on in the lives of the people to whom James was writing this letter.

And so there is the need for him to speak to them in the midst of their suffering. He does here at the beginning of verse 7. I want you to take note of this, maybe even underline it in your Bible, because here he says, "*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.*" This is such an incredibly simple and yet powerful exhortation.

Be patient. We all go through difficulties. We all go through challenges. I dare say theirs were probably worse than ours. But yours may be rough too. But the word to us from the Word of God is be patient until the coming of the Lord. And there are several things that we can pull out of this simple portion of this verse. I know we haven't even read the whole verse.

One of the most important things is the simple acknowledgement that Jesus is returning. Jesus is coming back. I like to just kind of say that and just pause for a moment for effect and just to see kind of how people seem to respond. We forget something. In the early church, this whole idea of the soon return of Jesus, the imminent return of Christ, was absolutely an overwhelming concept that was very pervasive in their lives and in their theology. In their living their everyday thinking, they were constantly aware of the fact that Jesus could come back at any time.

And that's one of the things that this is saying to us here. But the second is that there is an expectation in these words that when Jesus does come, He's going to bring a recompense along with Him for all of the things that have happened against you and many others throughout the course of human history.

He is going to bring a judgment. He is going to come a second time to judge. He came the first time to save. Remember what Jesus said: God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17). That was the first coming.

But in the second coming, He comes as a judge. And what we gain from that, first of all, are two things. Number one, He does not come to judge you in the sense of judging you for your sin if you are in Christ today. And the reason is if you are in Christ today, Jesus has already been judged on your behalf because you accepted what He did on the cross. And now there's no judgment remaining. Paul said, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:1).

Why? Because Jesus was condemned and judged for you. So you see, you don't need to fear, you don't need to have any fear of the coming of the Lord. Because judgment is passed from the standpoint of judgment for sins. Please get that through your heart. But He is going to come and judge sins of those who have rejected the way of life.

And for you and me, that means that we can leave the injustices and the hurts and the wrongs that have been committed against us, and entrust them to the Lord. And know that He's going to deal with them. He hasn't forgotten and there's nothing that He hasn't noticed along the way. And He's going to deal with them.

And that means you don't have to from the standpoint of jumping up and taking care of it on your own.

I want to show you an exhortation from Peter:

1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)

...let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

He says, "*...let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator,*" have you entrusted your life and your soul and all the things that have happened to you and the sufferings that you've dealt with in this life to a faithful Creator? Because you can. You can.

He says, just entrust yourself to God and just keep doing what you know you're supposed to be doing. Just keep doing good. But entrust your heart and entrust your soul to the Lord. He's going to handle it.

And then the last thing that this first portion of verse 7 reminds us of is that the Lord wants us to wait patiently while we wait for His return. And that is the point of what James is saying. "*Be patient, therefore, brothers,*" and this is admittedly difficult in light of all the things that are going on in the world today. But you know what? It's no more difficult than the things that were going on when this letter was first written. They were dealing with just as much corruption and just as much wrong and just as much junk in society as we are.

And the need is still to wait patiently. Now, when James says wait patiently, he's not saying that you shouldn't do anything about it. Because here in the United States of America, we have something that the people in James' day didn't have. We live in a democratic society. And because of that, we have the option to vote and to do what we can to bring change into our society. However much we may feel we can do.

Well, that was something that the people in the Bible times, they didn't have that. You got a corrupt official, forget it, you can't do a thing about it. I mean, unless you're going to try to kill him. And often they did. They would try to just work up some kind of an assassination plot. But now you're a believer in Jesus. You know that's wrong. So what are you going to do now? You got a corrupt official, someone like emperor Nero, who is ruling during the time of the apostle Paul, in the early church. He was a crazy man.

He was literally insane. What are you going to do about that? Well, in James' day, it's like pray, live a quiet life, and stay out of the way. And wait for the Lord. And wait patiently for the Lord who will come back and will deal with these situations. Here in the United States, again, we have options available to

us, and I think we should take advantage of them in order to bring some kind of positive change.

But the encouragement from James to be patient here is meant to keep us from responding negatively to the things we see going on in the world today. Because it's real easy to get all lathered up when you see what's happening in the world and want to do something. And I don't mean do something good. I mean, do something bad.

You should do something good. If you can. And that's where our democratic society comes in and I'm thankful for it. But there's sometimes when we're hurt personally, that our temptation is to do something negative. And that's one of the reasons we're being told here to be patient.

He wants to encourage us not to respond negatively when we suffer at the hands of those who are corrupt. And when we see injustice all around us. Because there is a great human tendency to take matters into our own hands and to retaliate. 'You got me. Oh yeah, I'm going to get you.' A very strong impulse in our humanity, in our hard wiring. There's another tendency that waiting patiently can help to mitigate and to defer. And that is the human tendency to become discouraged.

I don't know if you've watched the news for a protracted period of time. But it's not difficult to become discouraged when you see what's happening in the world. Or even what's happening in your life personally. Maybe it's what's happening in your home, your family, your city, your state. And the reason discouragement is a very dangerous thing is that it leads to, or it can anyway, lead to despair. And despair leads to hopelessness. And as believers, we have every reason to have hope. We should be some of the most hopeful people that the world has ever known. We cannot afford for our Christian witness alone to give into despair and hopelessness related to the situation or the condition of the world.

We can't afford to do that. We're not going to lead people to Jesus if we're walking around moping and crying and criticizing constantly the condition of the world. What do you expect out of the world? It's under the control of the evil one, for heaven's sakes. What do you expect out of something that's under the control of the enemy?

I expect it to be a mess. I expect it to be a train wreck. But we're going to put our hope in Jesus. We're going to do what we can to be the salt and the light, right? And there's things that God's given us to do, whether right in our own

home, in our community, in our state, maybe even the nation. If God's given you a platform, go for it.

And that's great, but we're not going to despair. Why? Because Jesus is coming back. And if we really, truly were hanging on to that as a hope, it would change our outlook. You'll notice I didn't read the second half of verse 7 yet, but that really kind of underscores James' whole point where he says, "*See how the farmer waits*" he uses this example of a farmer who waits.

I was raised in the farmland of Minnesota. A lot of my friends were farmers and that meant I got to go out on the farm and do things, like when harvest time came around. But he uses this example of how you plant your seed in the ground and then you wait. You have to wait. He says, "*See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains.*" The early rains in Israel were the rains that came at planting season, and the late rains were those that took place at harvest time.

And James is making this point about the farmer to encourage us to be patient as we wait for the appearing of our Lord and Savior. We need to be patient. We need to wait. We need to hang on to that. And don't let negative things grow up at heart, rise up in your heart. Don't let discouragement rise up in your heart.

He says in verse 8, I love what he says here. "*8You also, be patient.*" It's hard being patient, isn't it? But he says, "*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*" Establish your hearts. That word establish means to secure. Secure your heart in faith. Strengthen your heart in faith. For what? The coming of the Lord.

It's interesting, isn't it? We hear these things and we're not used to being exhorted this much about this whole idea of the coming of the Lord. Because James is challenging those who are listening to have an unshakable confidence in the return of Jesus Christ. And he was telling them during that time to have an unshakable confidence of the imminent return of Jesus.

Now, at this point, somebody might kind of go, 'wait, just a second. You're telling me that James told the recipients of this letter that Jesus could come at any time?' Yes, that's right. 'But He didn't. But He didn't come. So was James blowing smoke? Was he wrong? What's the deal? So you're telling me that we've been telling people for almost 2000 years that He could come at any minute. Is that what you're telling me?'

Yeah, that's basically what I'm telling you. And that's exactly the way God wants us to live. This has been ringing in our ears, this idea that Jesus could come at any time, ever since the angels announced it. You remember Jesus, during that period of time where He appeared to them after the resurrection, He finally walked up to the Mount of Olives with His closest men and He gave them a final exhortation.

Read with me what happened here in Acts chapter 1:

Acts 1:9-11 (ESV)

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

This and several other passages in the New Testament are where we get our understanding of what we call the imminent return of Jesus. And imminent means it could happen at any time. And yes, the early Christians believed it and so do we. And the reason we believe it is because we were told no man knows the day or the hour (Matthew 24:36). And if somebody tells you they know, they are blowing smoke because they don't know. But we know that His coming is imminent. It could happen at any time.

There's another reason why God wants His children to live under that understanding that His return could happen at any time. And that is, it changes how we live. Right? It changes how we live. You think twice about what you're going to do, with the idea that Jesus could return. I mean, think about it. Think about some of the dumbest things you've ever done in your life in terms of really really really bad choices. And I'm not just talking about you pick the wrong choice.

I'm talking about things you did that you knew were wrong at the time. You knew that it was contrary to God's Word and you did it anyway. Now, think back about that time when that happened and imagine an angel appeared to you and said, 'in the next 10 minutes, Jesus is going to return.' Would you have done that stupid thing?

I dare say not. You would have gone, 'Ooh, I need to get my house in order.' Because this angel just appeared and said, Jesus is coming back. Well, okay. We were told in the Word of God, His return is imminent. That means any time.

When you hold that in your heart, I mean, when you really, truly believe it, it changes the way you live. Because you don't want to get caught by Jesus doing some things when He comes back.

Such as what James talks about in verse 9. Look what he says in verse 9 in your Bible. He says, *"Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door."* That's another way of saying He's coming back. He's coming back to judge. And you don't want to get caught grumbling when He comes back.

What is grumbling? It's talking about your neighbor, talking about your brother, your sister. Criticizing. Just that angry kind of, can't say anything nice. He says don't do it. What's the motive not to do it? Jesus is coming back. It changes the way you live on a day to day basis.

Verses 10 and 11. James now goes on to mention a couple of examples of those who modeled patience, patient endurance, waiting on the Lord. And he talks about the Old Testament prophets. Man, the things they went through. The persecutions. They were just told by God to go give a message and they got persecuted for it. Some of them killed.

And then he brings up Job. Verse 11, he says, *"Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job,"* (if you have a different Bible translation on your lap, your Bible, instead of steadfastness, may say perseverance. I like that word. And he says,) *"and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."* So he gives Job as an example, and Job is a good example. Even though he had gone through unspeakable suffering he refused to curse God.

And so he persevered, he continued on, but you know what? I've read the book of Job. I've taught through the book of Job several times and I happen to know from reading the book that Job struggled greatly to understand the purpose and the will of God in his life. And the road to patient endurance was not a smooth one. It was a bumpy road and sometimes it is. Sometimes the difficulties of getting to that place of faithfully waiting and persevering through difficulty in trial is a challenging road to get to. It was for Job. But he got there in the end, and that's the point.

Verse 12 gives another exhortation in light of the Lord's return. He says, *"But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath,"* he says, if you're going to say yes to somebody, let your yes be enough. And if you're going to say no to somebody, let your no be enough. He

says, don't worry about swearing an oath. Because they used to swear oaths, back in those days, to punctuate their answer or their statement as true. Because people would say, I don't believe you.

They'd say something and somebody inevitably say, 'Oh yeah, I don't believe you.' 'Oh, I swear it.' And then they'd swear on something that was bigger than themselves. And that was just a thing that the Jews did. And so, James is saying, you know what? Don't even go there. If you need to give a yes, give your yes. And let your yes be enough.

And if you need to say no, then say no. You don't need to swear. 'I swear, it's no.' You didn't let your no be enough. Let your word be enough. And by the way, this is not a prohibition against taking an oath in a court of law. That's not what they're talking about here. You're talking about in general conversation, let your word be enough.

James now asks, verse 13, *"¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise."* But hopefully not around the one who's suffering. Doesn't say that, but I just kind of threw that in there. It's interesting that he brings up both an individual who is suffering and an individual who is praising God, and he tells them to do the same thing.

Take it to God. Are you suffering? Bring it to God in prayer. Are you rejoicing? Rejoice to God. Praise God. It's another way of saying what we've heard so many times in the book of Proverbs chapter 3, acknowledge the Lord in all of your ways (Proverbs 3:6). Are you suffering? Acknowledge the Lord. Are you happy? Acknowledge the Lord.

How about if your body isn't working very well? Verse 14, *"¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord."* Can I just tell you, I don't think Christians do this enough. I don't think we do this enough. I don't think people call for the elders enough. I think you should do it more. Just out of obedience.

Not because our prayers are so powerful sort of a thing. But it says it in the word. Call for the elders. Let them pray. Let them anoint them with oil. We actually do that. We actually anoint people with oil. We don't pour it over your head, so don't worry. We just kind of dab it, on a person's forehead. And the reason we do that is because there's nothing mystical or magical about the oil. I've used olive oil from Albertsons before. There's nothing magical. It's a touch point of faith really, more than anything. And we're doing it out of obedience.

Just obedience. We're not being weird. It says anoint people with oil and pray for them if they're sick.

He goes on here and he says, "¹⁵*And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick,*" now it's interesting. He talks about the prayer of faith and that kind of jumped off the page to me. And I thought, what is that? What is the prayer of faith? Because there are people, are actually even whole movements, that are trying to describe the prayer of faith for us.

It's very animated and it's very . . . oh, I can't even think of the word. But it's very demanding, I guess, is maybe the word. But I am convinced within myself that the prayer of faith is more of an attitude of the heart, whereby we trust the Lord completely whatever he's going to do. Because I don't know what the Lord is going to do. I am responsible and you are responsible if somebody comes to you and says, Oh, I'm sick and I need prayer, pray for them and pray the prayer of faith, which is a faith in God that He is able.

And I hope that before you pray, you actually reconcile yourself to that very simple truth to ask yourself: is God able to take care and heal this person? Do I believe God can heal this person from this disease or whatever it is they're needing prayer for? If I do, then I'm going to say, 'I'm going to pray the prayer of faith because I believe God can heal you.' Now, is God going to heal that person. We'll see. That's up to God. That's not up to you. And it's not up to me.

I don't heal people. Neither do you. We pray for people to be healed. Jesus went around healing people. I don't go around healing people. I asked Jesus to do the healing. It's very important. And you got to understand that there are times when the Lord just simply speaks and says, go.

And there are times when it just doesn't happen that way. Pastor Chuck Smith told a story about in some of the semi-early days of Calvary Chapel down in Southern California, when a man was being brought down after the service for prayer in a wheelchair. And his kids, his older kids were pushing him down in the wheelchair to get prayer.

And while they were coming down, the Lord just spoke to Chuck and just said, you need to lay hands on this man and heal him. I'm going to do a work of healing. And Chuck just was filled with faith and trust and confidence that was what the Lord was absolutely going to do. And so he prayed for him.

And he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, be strengthened and get up out of the wheelchair." And the guy did, to everybody's amazement. He got up and he

walked around. He's like, 'praise the Lord.' Well, the kids of this guy came up to Chuck afterwards and they said, we just wanted you to pray for his cold.

He had a cold. Cool, huh? It was the Lord's timing. It was the Lord's timing. Now, here's the interesting thing about the story. Chuck went on to say how the very next week some people came down for prayer who had some similar sort of physical issues. Chuck prayed for them, and they walked away unchanged. And his kids actually came up to him, his kids were teenagers at the time, and they came up and they asked him, 'so why did that guy get healed last week and not these people this week?' And Chuck was like, 'that's up to God.' That's up to God to heal, not me. We just pray the prayer of faith.

Now, there are people who believe that if I pray with faith, then God is obligated to do what I tell Him to do. Well, I don't believe that. Sorry. I believe we have to pray in accordance with His will. So, anyway, so there you go.

Verse 16. He goes on. *"¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."* In other words, don't let anything stand in the way. Don't let anything get in the way. Don't let barriers of unforgiveness and sinful activity and stuff like that get in the way of what you want the Lord to do in your life. And he also reminds us here at the end of verse 16 that, *"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."*

And in proof of that statement, he then gives us the example of Elijah. He says, *"¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature"* meaning a sinful nature. He had a sinful nature just like you and me. We think of some of these Old Testament prophets and we're like, 'Whoa, Elijah.' He was a guy. He was a guy. And he had a sinful nature. And he says here that Elijah, even being a man just like you, just like me, *"he prayed fervently that it might not rain,"* and you know what? For three and a half years, it didn't. And then he prayed again and rain came back upon the earth.

James is giving us that example as an encouragement for us to pray the prayer of faith and trust God. Because again, it's God who does the work. I can't make it stop raining or rain. I can't do any of that stuff. But I pray and I know that God can. I know that I know that I know that God can. And that's where the prayer of faith comes from.

He says in verse 19, *"¹⁹My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a*

multitude of sins." And so he's talking here about someone who has wandered, but he doesn't just say wandered.

It's very important. You read these verses, you're 'what in the world is he talking about? What does he mean here?' Well, the key to understanding these couple of verses is the phrase "wanders from the truth." Wanders from the truth. Do you understand that that's different from wandering away from the Lord?

There are people who wander away from the Lord, but they hang on to the truth. They just either got lazy or got distracted or drawn off course or whatever. But if you'd go to that person in the midst of their wandering and ask them, do you believe Jesus died for your sins? They'd say, 'yes, I do.' Do you believe Jesus is the only way you can be saved? 'Yes, I do.' Do you believe Jesus is coming back? 'Oh, yes, I do.' Are you walking with the Lord right now? 'Not really.' They haven't wandered from the truth. They've wandered from the Lord.

Do you understand, people, what it is to wander from the truth? Again, the truth is you are saved by grace through faith alone. This is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). That's the truth.

What happens when you wander from that? And you start getting into, 'well, Jesus isn't enough. And I got to do something else. And I've been convinced that if I read anything but the King James Bible, I'm not saved.' Do you know there's people telling folks that right now? Did you know that? 'If you don't read the King James Bible, if you read any other Bible, you probably won't make it to heaven.' I get that question about once a week. Or, 'you must be baptized to be saved and preferably in our church. With our formula. We know how to say the formula. And if you don't say the formula just like we say the formula, you're not saved.' Well, they've wandered from the truth. They've wandered from the truth.

The truth is I'm saved by grace through faith alone. Or, 'have you spoken in tongues yet?' And I'm not putting down the gift of speaking in tongues. It's a legitimate gift of the Spirit. But it is not a requirement to be saved. And yet in many churches, people are told if you have not spoken in tongues, you're not born again. They've wandered from the truth. And there's lots of other things. Lots of other things.

There were things going on in Paul's day, for heaven's sake. The churches in Galatia were being drawn off after circumcision and food laws. And the Colossians, Paul had to talk to them about not keeping special days like Sabbath keeping. Because there were people going around telling them if you don't keep

the Sabbath, you're going to hell. They've wandered from the truth. You see, when you wander from the truth, you're on very very dangerous ground.

Again, what is the truth? Well, we sang it. We sang it. Wasn't that last song we sang in worship just the best? I need no other argument. I need no other plea. Talking about how Jesus died and that's enough. That was enough. Jesus died for me and that was enough. I love what Jesus said on the cross before He dismissed His spirit.

When He said, "*It is finished* (John 19:30)," my favorite words in the Bible. Because they constantly remind me: Paul, you cannot add to what Jesus did. It was done. It was finished. And it was paid in full. And you can't add to it. And if you try to, you're wandering from the truth. And that is why James gives such an important understanding to this related to wandering. Not just wandering from the Lord. Wandering from the truth.

He says, you bring somebody back from that wandering, you've saved them. So is it possible for somebody to wander from the truth? Well, according to James, it is.

People ask me probably every week, 'Pastor Paul, do you believe you can lose your salvation?' Oh, how tired I get of that question, first of all. But then it's like, no, not in the way that people think. Can I sin to the point where I lose my salvation? I don't believe that's possible. And the reason I don't is because we all sin. We all mess up on a regular basis. But the Bible tells us the blood of Jesus keeps on cleansing us from sin (1 John 1:7). Did you know that? The blood of Jesus has a perpetual work of cleansing going on in our lives.

We are perpetually cleansed from our sin. And it's a beautiful thing. Because our faith is in Him, He cleanses us from our sin in an ongoing way. So somebody says, 'well, then, why are we taught to pray forgive us our sins, and to make that a regular part of our prayer?' It's not so you get saved again, and it's not because you've lost your salvation once you sin.

The reason we're told to come to the Lord and ask for forgiveness is because sin gets in the way of our relationship with God. And we have to get it cleared out of the way, so there's nothing standing in the way. But it's not like when you sin, you lose your salvation. You can't lose your salvation by messing up.

So you're secure. But James also reminds us that somebody can wander from the truth. That's different. It's a different thing. It's a different thing altogether. Can you wander from the truth? James thought so.

Paul thought so. It's why he argued so passionately with the Galatians and he was very passionate in his arguments with them. And he told them this. He said, listen to me. If you allow yourselves to be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you, whatever (Galatians 5:2). Those are his words, not mine. Paul believed that you could wander away by adding, because it becomes no gospel at all.

And that's what he said to the Galatians when he started his letter: I'm shocked that you guys are abandoning the gospel so quickly. You've abandoned it. So let's understand what the real biblical idea here is. Are you secure in your faith? Absolutely. Absolutely. You mess up every day. So do I. Jesus loves you. You're forgiven. Don't worry about it. God loves you. And you're not going anywhere. Just hang on to this important truth: It is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me. It's all you need to know.

Let's stand together. If you need prayer, we'd be happy to pray for you down front here this morning.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the book of James. Thank you, Lord, for the truths and the power of this epistle. Thank you, Lord, for even the challenging passages that we have to think through it and figure out what it says and what it's not saying.

Help us, Lord, to take from this message, this book of James, and apply it to our lives. We want to just lean upon you, Lord. And we just want to declare it is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me. It is finished, paid in full, and there's nothing more I can add, nor will I ever try because Jesus has done it.

We thank you for that and praise you for finishing the work through Jesus Christ, our savior. And all God's people said, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your day.