

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part sixteen

Teaching #1834 - Sunday, October 11th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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WHAT A SPIRIT-SENSITIVE CHURCH LOOKS LIKE

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; you have murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you."

James started dealing with the danger of falling in love with success, wealth and power in the text we studied in our last teaching - **James 4:13-17** - "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit'— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. *What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes*. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. [17] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

Can you connect the dots between those verses and today's text? The link isn't obvious, but it *is* real and important. What happens when people begin to go through the ordinary affairs of life - travel, business, purchases, accounting and ledgers, profit and loss - without thinking about God? What happens, says James, is they start to consider their time their own and they start to consider their business their own. They get *presumptuous*. But this sin of heart isn't openly or obviously wicked. It's just the way most people live in the real world.

But look at today's text on the same theme. What happens when people think of their time as their own and their business as their own and their workers as their own? Well, what happens is they begin to do *whatever they want* with those things and those people.

Two sins thrive when people forget their life is a vapour. James says they can easily begin to *hoard their wealth* and they can easily begin to *mistreat others for gain*. James has already said it this way - **James 3:16** - "For where....selfish ambition exists, there will be disorder and every vile practice." Every vile practice grows out of selfish ambition. That's where today's text fits in.

Also, take notice again of that last verse in chapter 4 - "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." It's so important because it tells us we really have to come to terms with God's Word whenever it speaks to us. What's going to happen here in the next 30 minutes, or so? We listen to so many things each week - lectures, discussions, web sites, podcasts. Is this time around God's Word just one more thing to hear? James says God's Word makes *unique* claims on its hearers. It can't be ignored just because we don't think we're doing anything bad. Whenever it calls our attention to anything at all, it makes us immediately accountable. "*Whoever knows the right thing to do....*" (4:17).

That's what the Bible is all about. It tells us what's *right*. That's what we're doing here this morning. We want to know what's right and what's good. But James says you can't just find out what God has to say the way you open the morning paper to find out what the editor has to say, or tune in to the latest blog. You can listen to them and turn them off. You can agree or disagree. You hear for a while and then you simply stop listening. And that's the end of the whole process.

But James says you and I can never come to church like that. We can never read our Bibles like that. We can never bow to pray like that. Every time God's Word comes into your heart it comes like a binding summons. It comes with *accountability* attached. You either keep it or break it. And God always places high honor on how we keep His Word. He doesn't just *give* it out. He *keeps track* of what we're doing with it.

Look at *five life lessons* in today's challenging text:

- 1) **LIFE LESSON #1 - SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE ALLOW THE WORD OF GOD TO OVERRIDE THE SHALLOW, COMMON RESPONSES TO DIVINE CORRECTION**

James 5:1 - "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you."

This is the second time James has had the nerve to tell people to **weep** when they encounter the presence of God. The other is **James 4:9** - "Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom."

Lest you think James is a bit sick, he also tells people to rejoice. But even here, he doesn't say what you and I might expect - **James 1:2** - "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...."

Notice something very important. Those **suffering** under trial are brought under the authority of the Word to **rejoice**. Those **indulging** themselves in material prosperity are brought under the authority of the Word to **weep** and **mourn**. What's going on here? James calls for the response that is **opposite** to what circumstances would dictate. Suffering would **naturally** lead to weeping and mourning. Prosperity would **naturally** lead to indulgence and pleasure. These are **automatic** responses to life.

So how do you tell when the Holy Spirit, rather than impulse, habit, or emotion is governing my life? Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the authority of the Word of God will make me **counter-cultural** to the normal patterns of response to life. The Holy Spirit **pushes and crowds** the Lordship of Jesus into my life in ways that are **culturally and economically distinguishable**.

James covers both rejoicing and weeping because pleasure and pain cover the poles of my life. Everything is a part of one or the other. Which is harder - to rejoice in suffering or to weep over self-indulgence? I don't know, but James calls us to both.

In our text today he sounds an alarm to those being smothered in indulgent pleasure. Spiritually sensitive people recognize God's call to responses that don't fit in with the ordinary patterns and habits of the flesh. They see **dangers** where everyone else sees indulgence and prosperity. And they **weep** as the Holy Spirit exposes carelessness and selfishness.

2) **LIFE LESSON #2 - SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE KNOW THERE IS A PLACE FOR WEeping AND MOURNING IN THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH**

James 5:1 - "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you."

Think of this as an **invitation** - and it **is** an invitation. It begins with the same two words as the song we used to sing "**Come, now is the time to worship....**" Only it isn't a call to worship, at least not the way we've come to **think** of worship. How many times have you been in any worship gathering in the last five years where the dominant call was, "**Come church, we really need to weep and mourn and feel painfully heart-broken for our unguarded self-indulgence!**"

Question - **Where do people learn to feel bad about sins that don't bother them?** How does that happen? Don't just glibly say, "Well, the Holy Spirit will convict them, Pastor Don. We don't have to." Really? Then why are there so many Christians - like the ones James addressed in this letter - who **don't** feel convicted at all about what they're doing?

I attended about 5 different churches in August. And with one exception, let me tell you what I've found. Church services are becoming all the same. And I mean **exactly** the same, everywhere. Strangely, the ones that are **most** alike - most **in the same box** - are the ones priding themselves on **not** being traditionally churchy.

They've all got the same contemporary band - synth, drums, guitars, perhaps a sax. They've all got the same worship team lined up at the front - sometimes three or four, sometimes six or eight. They've all got the new "**mood lighting**" and dramatic videos to enhance and accompany the songs. None do hymns. Usually you can grab a coffee or cappuccino somewhere in the middle of the gathering. Dress is casual in all of them. The sermon is up-beat and light - lots of stories, frequently a drama injected for effect. Usually Scripture is never read. Lights are kept low.

Now, except for two of those points, there's nothing wrong with **anything** I've pointed out. Trends come and go, even in the church. We do some of those things here, and I'm constantly interested in changes that are good changes. So this is not some old-fashioned tirade against contemporary worship. I **like** contemporary worship. I prefer the worship of today to the worship I grew up with.

But, for all that, there **is** a problem here, and it relates back to our text. Where does James' call - "**Come now, you rich,**

weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you! - where does ***that*** call fit into this “shorts and sandals and cappuccino crowd?” My concern is it’s getting harder and harder for today’s church to stay sensitive to a Holy Spirit who frequently wants to pierce our heart with God’s Word. What does ***“being fed”*** in a church service feel like? Is it the same as feeling blessed or feeling delightful? Can it sometimes feel like a broken and humble spirit? Can it hurt?

If you feel good all the time in God’s presence you’re not ***listening*** to Him. You’re just ***singing songs*** to Him. A Spirit-sensitive church knows how to rejoice greatly and knows how to weep and mourn deeply. God can’t work his ***complete*** work until both those Scriptural calls are welcomed with equal passion.

3) **LIFE LESSON #3 - GOD ISN'T AGAINST PEOPLE BEING RICH, BUT HE IS AGAINST PEOPLE BEING SELF-INDULGENT**

James 5:2-3 - ***“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.”***

Spiritually sensitive people rejoice in what they ***give***, not in what they ***have***. They know it’s much easier to ***make*** money than to ***steward*** money. And the proof of that is the flesh and blood of verses 2 and 3. These people had ***accumulated*** a great deal of wealth. But the fact that they were better at ***making*** it than ***stewarding*** it was obvious in the way it was wasting away - ***“rotted garments - corroded silver and gold - laid up treasure”*** (5:2-3).

Now, silver and gold don’t actually rust like steel. And these rich people weren’t dressed in threadbare clothes. James is making a point about ***wasting*** resources. He’s making a point about the way these things ***aren’t eternal***. We only have them for a short while. They are to be ***used*** for God’s glory, not hoarded, not wasted on self-indulgence.

These people didn’t really ***need*** all they had. That was obvious by the way they were either ***laying it up in storage*** or ***extravagantly spending it on their own desires***. They ***couldn’t come up with anything better to do with their wealth!*** All they knew was how to ***make*** the money - not how to ***use*** the money.

4) **LIFE LESSON #4 - SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE REMEMBER GOD’S AWARENESS OF THE SECRET PARTS OF THEIR LIVES**

James 5:4 - ***“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.”***

As I was working through this text I immediately became aware of how easy it would be for all of us to think this verse has nothing to do with us. Most of us don’t have people working directly for us and we don’t have to sign their paychecks. But I would submit this verse has something to say to every person in this sanctuary. It has to do with teenagers and parents, teachers and mechanics, single adults and seniors, men and women.

Remember the context of the whole book of James. The book is written to the ***“twelve scattered tribes”*** (1:2). These new Christians - mostly Jewish - were driven away from their land and their homes because of their faith in Christ Jesus. Some had wealth and others had almost nothing.

In their new surroundings it was easy to see who had the clout and power. The rich quickly became the land owners. The poor worked for them. In an age when there were no unions or labor laws there was nothing the poor could do if they were victims of injustice. And there were no lines of credit available to them if they weren’t paid on time. The kids simply didn’t eat.

Those with the power ***knew*** they could do whatever they wanted to do. That’s what those words at the end of verse 6 are all about - ***“He does not resist you.”*** Of course he doesn’t. He has no course of action but to silently suffer. And here’s the really important point. ***There is no external pressure for the rich, in James’ situation, to change their behavior.*** No one will know whether they do or don’t.

Listening to the Spirit has everything to do with how ***motivated to repentance and righteousness you are when you know you can get away with doing whatever you want.*** It has to do with how ***hungry you are for the reign of God’s will in your life when not one person will ever find out if you’re obeying Him or not.*** Listening to the Spirit has to do with ***remembering God doesn’t just hear worship choruses. He hears the cry of every mistreated person - every lost opportunity - every perishing soul.***

That's what this difficult fourth verse is all about. When you put these strange verses all together here's what they reveal: spiritually sensitive people **weep and wail** over sins no one else knows about and no one else can **pressure** them to forsake.

5) **LIFE LESSON #5 - SPIRITUALLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE KEEP THE CONCEPT OF FINAL JUDGMENT VIBRANT AND VIVID IN THIS TEMPORAL, VISIBLE WORLD**

James 5: 3, 5-6 - "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***....[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; you have murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you."

"You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter" (5). What a phrase! I spent one summer in grade twelve working on the kill floor at Olympic Packers in Saskatoon. Without a doubt it was the worst summer job of my youth. The cattle don't know what's coming. They just eat and follow the animal in front of them. They probably think all their needs are being met. They have everything they need. Then comes the stun gun, the slit throat, and McDonald's Hamburgers.

That's James' picture. It's more vivid than our user friendly Christianity finds polite or comfortable, but it's the picture the Holy Spirit placed in Holy Writ. Spiritually sensitive people don't just ***indulge***. Spiritually sensitive people don't just ***consume***. They know the time-line of history comes to an abrupt end ***and they think about that all the time***.

Spiritually sensitive people know you can't run a race without thinking about the finish line. That's the difference between ***jogging*** and ***running a race***. And Paul says we're not out for a jog. We're running a race.

Think about finishing. Nothing will keep your life pure and on track like concentrating on ***finishing***. Wasted opportunities and wasted resources are the curse of the church. Every wasted opportunity cries out to God. Don't ***waste*** anything. Abundance isn't for ***indulgence***. It's for ***kingdom investment***. When it's all over - much sooner than you think - the only thing that will bring joy - eternal joy - to your heart will be finishing well.