

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, October 13th, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant

River or Reservoir
Proper 23
James 5:1-6

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Our hearts are ready, O Lord,
 our hearts are ready!

We will sing and make melody!

We will awaken the dawn!

We will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples,
 we will sing praises to you among the nations.

**For your steadfast love is great above the heavens,
 and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

All Knowing Father,
 you seek a people,
 who will worship you in spirit and in truth;
 and so we ask you to inspire
 and bless the worship that occurs week by week in this church,
 in our words and music,
 in our prayers and hymns,
 and in our studies and sermons.
 Open the hearts and lips of those
 who worship you today all over the world,
 that all of us may listen with an alert conscience
 to the preaching of your Word
 and come to you filled with true repentance and faith.
 We ask this in the name of
 our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Children's Hymn

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
 Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God,
 we confess that we have sinned against you
 in thought, word, and deed,
 by what we have done,
 and by what we have left undone.
 We have not loved you
 with our whole heart and mind and strength.
 We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
 In your mercy forgive what we have been,
 help us amend what we are,
 and direct what we shall be,
 so that we may delight in your will
 and walk in your ways,
 to the glory of your holy name.
 Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins
 is proclaimed to you.
 In Christ we have redemption through his blood,
 the forgiveness of our trespasses,
 according to the riches of his grace.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn #803: "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come"

Come, ye thankful people, come,
 raise the song of harvest home;
 all is safely gathered in,
 ere the winter storms begin;

God, our Maker, doth provide
 for our wants to be supplied.
 Come, to God's own temple, come:
 raise the song of harvest home.

All the world is God's own field,
 fruit unto God's praise to yield;
 wheat and weeds together sown,
 unto joy or sorrow grown;
 first the blade and then the ear,
 then the full corn shall appear.
 Lord of harvest, grant that we
 wholesome grain and pure may be.

Even so, Lord, quickly come
 to thy final harvest home:
 gather thou thy people in,
 free from sorrow, free from sin;
 there, forever purified,
 in thy presence to abide.
 Come, with all thine angels, come:
 raise the glorious harvest home.

Responsive Reading

Psalm 119: 33-40

³³ Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes;
 and I will keep it to the end.

³⁴ **Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
 and observe it with my whole heart.**

³⁵ Lead me in the path of your commandments,
 for I delight in it.

³⁶ **Incline my heart to your testimonies,
 and not to selfish gain!**

³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;
 and give me life in your ways.

³⁸ **Confirm to your servant your promise,
 that you may be feared.**

³⁹ Turn away the reproach that I dread,
 for your rules are good.

⁴⁰ **Behold, I long for your precepts;**

in your righteousness give me life!

Anthem (Music Ministry): “We Thank You Lord”

Prayer for illumination

(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

James 5:1-6

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

Sermon

James is challenging us all as Christians, reminding of us what it really means to be Christ-like in this world. In doing so he is pointing out the difference between being part of this world and living set apart from this world. Today he is going to challenge us in one of the most impactful and personal aspects of our life here on earth. Listen to that first verse of James chapter 5 again.

James 5:1

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Yes, James is talking about wealth, about money. What is interesting about money is that it is a very quick and easy way to determine where a person's heart is focused. Nothing is more revealing about a person's heart than their view on wealth, money and possessions. If you ever want to discover the truth in a person's heart, just take a look at their bank account, look at where they invest and spend their wealth.

And James is not just making things up here, he is referring back to the teachings of his brother Jesus. In Luke chapter 12 Jesus is approached by a man seeking his counsel.

Luke 12:13-15

13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” **14** But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?” **15** And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard

against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

In Jesus's day people would fight over inheritances, just like they did for thousands of years before he came, and just like they do today. Truthfully it is usually after someone's death that you see the truth about how a family feels about one another. When the will is opened up, it is easy to spot the one who is demon possessed.

That is what is happening here, a man is unhappy because he does not feel like he is getting his share of the inheritance, and Jesus warns him about covetousness. He says be careful, because the sum of your life is not the wealth, power, fame or any other thing that you amass here on earth. It does not matter if you get everything you desire here on earth if it does not come with you.

Mark 8: 34-38

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

We need to acknowledge that the things of this world are temporal, and we are often too focused on the here and now and forget that we should be focused on the eternal as God's faithful children.

Jesus then goes on in Luke to teach the 'parable of the rich fool'.

Luke 12:16-21

¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

A man who had a great year, his harvest was much greater than he anticipated, so he built himself bigger barns to store his surplus. He then dies almost immediately and goes to meet God where he is chastised because the rich fool was more concerned about his earthly treasure than his eternal soul.

So, he who dies with the most toys does not win, contradictory to what the bumper sticker that so many people live by claims. Christians need to beware of covetousness. Yes, we need, food, clothing and shelter. God knows that we need these things, but we should learn to be content with what we have, and not be covetous of what others have.

And this is where James is coming from today. He is warning the wicked wealthy people of this world. He is speaking to people who had amassed, food, clothing, land, and gold and silver. By the standard of they day they were very wealthy and affluent, however, they were not saved.

Yes, he is talking to unbelievers today, but he is doing so for a reason. He is speaking about the wealthy unbeliever as a reminder to the wealthy believer that they were meant to be different than the people of this world. He wants God's people to remember that people who are not God's children are condemned for their wickedness.

One point to make here is that it is not a sin to be wealthy, it is not a sin to have land, or clothes or other possessions. The Bible is filled with people who were rich, Abraham was rich, Job was rich, Joseph was second in wealth only to the Pharaoh of Egypt. King David and his son Solomon amassed great wealth in their kingdoms. In the new testament you have Joseph of Arimathea, Philemon and others who were doing much better than the average citizen.

People are not condemned because of their wealth; they are condemned because of their hearts. James is reminding us that God is looking into your heart and not your bank account.

One often misused verse of Scripture is that money is the root of all evil. You might have heard this before; you may even have said it yourself. That is not what the Scripture actually says.

1 Timothy 6:10

¹⁰ 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.

It is not money that is evil, but the love of money that condemns people. The problem is that our human nature allows our hearts to become covetous when we place anything above God in our hearts.

So, James tells those who are rich that they will weep and howl because of their wealth, because of their love of money they will suffer miseries for all of eternity.

James 5:2-3

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

James wants us all to acknowledge that the judgement of this world does not determine your eternity. God alone judges every human being, and his judgement will be that of condemnation for those who do not follow his ways. The rich that James is speaking to are the lost, he does not refer to them as brothers, but as the condemned, people who have not repented and not set themselves apart from worldly desires.

He tells them that they will weep and howl, in Greek he is describing a level of wailing that can only be understood as the sounds one makes in complete and utter despair. It is written in what is called the prophetic perfect tense, meaning that the miseries that are coming upon them will be filled with hardships, afflictions, and wretchedness that has already started and will continue for all of eternity.

This is contradictory to what the world teaches. How many times have we been told that 'Money brings happiness'? We are taught that if you have enough money, you can buy your happiness. Yet one of the greatest Beatle hits quotes 'Money can't Buy me love.' We all know at some level that money cannot buy happiness.

We see that evidenced in Lottery winners. We all like to imagine how great our life could be if we won the lottery. Yet most people end up worse off after they spend all of their winnings and struggle to get their life back in order. Money brings now worries and new burdens. It brings along new responsibilities. Money brings many things, but it does not bring peace, it does not bring rest.

It is Jesus Christ alone that can bring peace and rest to his people. Jesus told us that we must choose between the world and him. In Matthew 6 he said.

Matthew 6:24

²⁴"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

So, we have to choose our master, is it money or is it God, because whoever is at the center of your heart is the one you actually serve in this world.

James then begins to point out ways that you can discover who your master is in this world. He starts with those who hoard up, who amass for their own pleasure. He warns them that they have amassed their wealth, usually by fraud and cruelty, and they are spending it in sinful, selfish luxury. They are condemned because of what is happening in their hearts, not because of their wealth.

He tells them that all of their hoarded-up wealth serves no purpose in the afterlife. Their riches will tarnish, and rot and their garments will be moth eaten. James is saying that all of the things which you hoarded so carefully in this world have no eternal purpose, other than to testify that you chose the ways of this world over the ways of God. When you stand before God in judgement, we will all need to answer for the way that we lived, the choice we made, and James does not hesitate to tell these non-believers that their bank accounts will testify to their hearts first love, themselves, and that will lead to their condemnation by the fires of hell.

James is speaking about how when we have more than we need, whether that is food, clothing, or money we need to resist the urge to spend it on ourselves first, or put it into savings first, and see if there is a way that we can invest into God's kingdom first.

The problem was not that they had a lot of food, money, land or clothing, the problem was that instead of becoming a conduit of God's blessings to the rest of the world, they had become a reservoir for themselves. They built bigger barns, bought better houses, got a fancy new car, or the latest piece of technology. They enjoyed that Starbucks coffee everyday as they drove past a homeless man looking for a meal.

What James is trying to get us to understand is that chasing things in this world is an endless cycle of destruction. We will fall prey to the ways of the world and always be seeking out the next step, the bigger and better if we are not cautious. I have met with many young people who have told me that they will tithe when they make a little more money, then when they get a better job and make more money they spend it on new things and they are back in the same situation, tithing when they make a little more money, and they get a promotion with a hefty raise, and a new car, and move into a nicer apartment, and they cycle continues.

James is saying remember that we are stewards of God's blessing here on earth. We need to ask ourselves if we really need that bigger barn, that bigger house, that new technology, that shirt or pair of shoes, that Starbucks coffee. Do we need it, or do we want it? James wants us to know the difference between what we want because of earthly desire and what we need in this world.

We hoard up our wealth, our resources, instead of using them for God's glory as we are called to do. The Bible tells us that we are stewards, called to be using the blessings we have been given by the Lord to bring the glory of God into the lives of those around us. If we are busy amassing and hoarding up his blessings, we are being sinful. James is reminding us that when we use God's blessings in pursuit of our own happiness, in pursuit of our sinful pleasures with no regard for God we are not living according to the will of God.

James Boyce said it this way, 'The problem is that being sinful men and women we take what we are given, and we use it for ourselves at the expense of other people rather than receiving these things as gifts in trust from God to be used in his service and at his direction. We need to learn that we are merely stewards of what God has given and we must use what He has given rightly!'

Christians need to remember that the things we have in this life are not our own, but gifts from God. Yes, the world says we own our house, our car, our bank accounts, all of our stuff, but all of that stuff we got because of the life God has given us, because of the gifts and talents he has provided us with.

Remember the parable of the rich fool. He experienced a year of bumper crops, and instead of sharing his fortuitous harvest with others, especially those in need, he just built bigger barns for himself. The problem was he was rich in this world, happy to put his feet up and reap in the harvest, to drink and be merry for himself. His focus was selfish and prideful, and when he died, he was told so by the Lord. God asked him where all his worldly wealth is now, what purpose does it serve now that he is dead. There are no pocket sin death shrouds, there are no u-hauls in funeral procession and all of the wealth that the pharaohs, Vikings, and kings of all nations had buried with them to take into the afterlife is still there in their grave or in one of our museums today.

So do not covet what other have. Remember that 'love of money is the root of all evil verse' Here is more of what it says to the believer.

1 Timothy 6:5-10

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ 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.

We came with nothing, and we leave with nothing. So be content with what you have.

Jesus said it this way

Matthew 6: 19-21

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Our treasure is where our heart is, and James says your heart better not be focused on money, selfishness and pride or you risk God's condemnation.

All of our resources belong to God, our talents, our treasures and our time. They are all gifts from God, all blessing that he has given us in this world not for our own selfish purposes, not for our own worldly gain, but so that we could invest them into glorifying his name in this world. And sorry, but that means no hoarding our resources, whether that is talent, treasure or time for ourselves when we have an opportunity to use them in God's name.

James does not stop there though; he also has something to say about how we live. James tells us that we cannot lie, cheat and steal to get ahead in this world. If you are a Christian, you should not be looking for loopholes in the system, you should not be cheating on your taxes or tricking people to make a quick buck. Christians should always chose the moral and ethical path, even when everyone else is going down the route of quick and easy.

James in speaking to the wicked wealth landowners says.

James 5: 4

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.

You did not pay those who did the work for you, you cheated them a fair wage. He actually says that their cries have reached the ears of God because of the injustice. So, if you don't like the idea of God coming after you to seek justice for those whom you have wronged you should treat people properly, not look for ways to save money and cut corners.

Remember in Jesus's day most people worked for a single day and then got paid for their labors that day. They literally lived day to day! If they did not get paid, they and sometime their whole family did not eat that day. It is not so different today, people live paycheck to paycheck and paying people should be the priority of any business, yet many people are struggling with late paychecks, lower paychecks and sometime no paycheck.

God says pay people their due for the work they have performed. This is a warning to the wickedly wealthy that should be echoed into the world today where CEO's and other upper management are enjoying a wonderful lifestyle while the people at the bottom are struggling between paying rent and buying groceries. God hears their cries, and those at the top in this world will answer for their ways for all of eternity is what James is reminding us today.

James has told us not to hoard, not to lie, cheat and steal, and to that he is going to add do not use up your resources on self-indulgences.

James 5: 5

⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

Ouch! Do not spend your resources on yourself and your own selfish desires. Do not live your life in extravagant immorality, giving into the pleasures of this world. Do not trust in your own heart to guide you in this world, do not live a 'me first' lifestyle. Do not treat the Scriptures like a choose your own adventure book and obey what you want and ignore the parts that you do not like.

Do not live like the people describes in 2 Timothy Chapter 3.

2 Timothy 3: 1-7

3 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Do not be worldly, do not give into your own selfish sinful passions.

Paul describes a very accurate picture of the world today. A world where we have generational conflict, gender confusion, sexual perversion at our fingertips. A world that encourages so many sinful pleasures and goes to the extremes to not just encourage them but make them readily available for you too gorge yourself upon.

The same way in which the fatten calf is fed abundantly. Gorging itself on whatever it desires.

James uses the concept of the fattened calf purposely. For those of you who might be unfamiliar, a calf was sometime separated from the heard. Placed in its own little area, given lots of attention, get extra grasses and special foods, so that it would fatten up nicely.

Now I want you to think like a cow, you look over and see that little calf getting all the best food, all the attention, everything your cow heart desires. And in your cow mind

you get angry, envious, covetous, jealous, after all why does that calf get all those things while I am over here struggling to find a small patch of grass to chew.

The truth is that we all know that calf is on the way to the BBQ as the guest of honor. He will get nice and fat only to be slaughtered. So, James is saying why do you want to be like that fattened calf, why are you jealous, covetous, and envious of those who are headed to God's condemnation at their judgement.

If you want a good Biblical example of this read Psalm 73 by Asaph. It is too long to read fully here but to summarize Asaph says.

I almost stumbled because I envied the wicked.

They are wealthy, they never seem to get sick or suffer, their grass always seems greener. Everything seems to always go their way. They are happy always; their families seem perfect. I began to question if being a faithful follower serves any purpose. Until I came to your house, until I heard your word, until I realized that they are condemned in this world.

That is what James is telling us today. Do not stumble because of the wicked, know that they will suffer for all of eternity. Like Asaph we need to stop looking at the world and envying other and instead focus on God and the eternal perspective.

Finally, James says now that you do not hoard, and you do not lie, cheat, and steal to get ahead in this world, and you do not envy, covet or spend on your own selfish indulgences, I have one more thing to share, 'Do not murder for wealth!'

James 5: 6

⁶You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Remember the story of King Ahab and Naboth. Ahab wanted his vineyard and Jezabel helped him get it by falsely accusing Naboth so that he would be executed. People will murder to get ahead. People will kill to get rich.

When people place money first in their lives, they are willing to make whatever sacrifices they need to make to get what they are after. Even if that sacrifice is someone else's life. Remember that when money is involved the demons come out in a person's life, just look at all of the trouble money causes even within denominations where brotherly love should be first, there are battles over property and money.

James is saying, remember that the 'love of money is the root of all evil' and God is concerned about what is at the root of your heart.

Brothers and sisters do not become fixated on the things of this world, it will make you miserable. Do not hoard your resources, you cannot take them with you. Do not spend all your resources, your talent, time and wealth on yourself, it is meant to be used to glorify God who blessed you with those things. Don't envy the fatten calf on its way to the slaughterhouse, know that they are headed for judgement and condemnation.

Instead know that God is with you, God has guiding you, He has forgiven your sins, and you have hope in an eternity of peace and joy in his kingdom. Be patient, Jesus is coming back, and we need to live our lives each and every day like it is our last. Using our talents, our time and our wealth glorifying his name and building upon His kingdom. Ask yourself are you a reservoir of your blessings are you self-focused and self-indulgent, hoarding, cheating and doing what it takes to get ahead in this world? Or are you being a river of blessing to others living out your life as the Salt and Light of God's world in this dark and broken world?

Let us pray,

We Thank You for All Your Benefits

Lord God, heavenly Father,
we thank you for all your benefits.
You have given us body and life
and have graciously sustained us to this day.
Do not take your blessing from us.
Preserve us from greed,
that we may serve you only,
love you and abide in you
and not defile ourselves by idolatrous love
of wealth or goods,
but hope and trust only in your grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one true God, now and forever.

Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Trinity 15

Hymn: "I Sing Praises"

I sing praises to Your name, O Lord praises to your name, O Lord
For your name is great and greatly to be praised
I sing praises to Your name, O Lord praises to your name, O Lord
For Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

I give glory to Your name, O Lord glory to your anime, O Lord
for your name is great and greatly to be praised.

I give glory to Your name, O Lord glory to your name, O Lord
for Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

I give honour to Your name, O Lord honour to your name, O Lord
For your name is great and greatly to be praised
I give honour to Your name, O Lord honour to your name O Lord
For Your name is great and greatly to be praised.

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Offertory Prayer **(Congregant Prepared)**

Closing Hymn #457: "Now Thank We All Our God"

Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom God's world rejoices,
who from our mother's arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

Oh may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with everjoyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us,
and keep us all with grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
who reigns in highest heaven,
the Father and the Son
and Spirit now be given,
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore,
for thus it was, is now
and shall be evermore.

Pastoral Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are our living head.
Teach us to be your body here on earth—
your hands, your feet, your eyes, and your compassionate heart.
Lord, send the impulses of your love into the sinews of this church.
May your will and thoughts direct us.
Let your hands, through our hands, supply food for our neighbors' hunger.
Let them hear your voice as we visit and talk with them.
Let children come to us and sit in our laps, as they sat in yours.
Without you as our head, Lord, we are lifeless.
We wait for your power, your Word, your instruction.
Fill us with your life and love,
In the name of Jesus Christ,
Who lives and rules with you and the Holy Spirit as the one true God,
Now and forever, we pray. **Amen.**

Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you. **Amen.**