

# Mist Placed Confidence and Rotten Riches

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm grateful to be with you, and I'm grateful for the privilege of having God's word, and I'm grateful for Evelyn who's going to read scripture for us this morning. 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.

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. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 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.

Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your field, 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.

[ 1 : 16 ] You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened in your hearts a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Father, we are so grateful to receive your word. Holy Spirit, we are grateful for your presence with us. Would you please help us as we turn our attention to the preaching of your word?

Help us to listen. Help us to hear. Help us to believe. Help us to obey. Would you help us to see our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, even in this text, where it may seem as though it's difficult to find him.

Would you please help us as we sit under the preaching of your word? And, blessed Holy Spirit, would you be so kind as to help me as I open your word to your people?

Please help me and keep me from saying anything foolish or unhelpful or harmful. We want to hear what you have to say to us from this particular text in this particular moment of time.

[ 2 : 30 ] And so we come ready to hear, ready to believe, ready to obey. We ask all of this giving thanks in the name of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Do you ever draw a smiley face or maybe a heart, you know, with an arrow through it, on the foggy mirror after a hot shower?

How long does that drawing last? Do you think a foggy mirror would be a good place for a grocery list?

Or what about your itinerary for your next big hunting trip? Or what about the opening three lines for the next great American novel?

Or a note to your student's teacher? None of these would make any sense, would it?

- [ 3 : 36 ] Why? Well, because after about a minute, after the door is open, whatever you have written on this window or on this mirror is going to be gone.
- The fog will clear and your writing, your drawing, your love note for your wife, it will disappear. James uses this same word picture in our text to remind us of how short life truly is.
- And as we turn our attention to this portion of Scripture, I want you to notice something important. I want you to notice who James is writing to, or rather, who he is not writing to.
- He is no longer addressing the teachers and the leaders of God's people. That started in chapter 3 and verse 1, continues up to, I think, the end of verse 12 of chapter 4.
- He's not writing to them anymore. And he doesn't open this paragraph like he does frequently addressing the brothers, using that word for brothers and sisters that we see so often in the New Testament.
- [ 4 : 48 ] And this suggests that James is not addressing especially the community of believers. Instead, James turns the spotlight on two specific groups of people.
- The first, self-confident merchants. And the second, self-indulgent landowners.
- And you may notice as we enter into this particular portion of James' letter, that the tone sounds a lot more like an Old Testament prophet than a New Testament pastor.
- Both paragraphs that we'll look at today begin with words that to our ears might sound something like, listen up. James says, come now.
- Verse 13. Come now. James starts with self-confident merchants.
- [ 6 : 10 ] Notice how they talk. They speak as if they are in control. They are in control of time. We're going to do something either today or tomorrow.
- They are in control of travel. We're going to go to such and such a city. They're in control of the future. They've decided how long they're going to stay there.
- A year or so. And they are in control of circumstances. We're going to trade. We're going to engage in business. And we're going to make a profit.
- They sound almost godlike, don't they? All-knowing. As though they are all-powerful.
- As though they are fully in control of the world around them. But they're not. Look at verse 14. And yet, you do not know what tomorrow will bring.
- [ 7 : 15 ] What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.
- James interrupts their boasting with this simple truth. They don't know what tomorrow will bring. And I just love this irony. They are busy planning the next 12 months.
- Right? Preparing a plan for the next 12 months. And James says, what are you doing? You can't even know what tomorrow is going to be like. The next 24 hours are out of your control.
- Their self-confidence deceives them. Life is short. Because life is short. It's a mist. It's a vapor. It's like the puff of exhaust behind a car.
- It's like your breath on a frosty morning. It's like the foggy mirror after a hot shower. Life is short.
- [ 8 : 26 ] There's a textual detail that I think matters. And it comes up next in verse 15. If you look at your Bible, to smooth out the English, translators have added a word.
- In most translations, you'll see the word ought. NIV uses the word, I believe, should. And it changes what's going on in verse 15. So that it becomes, you ought to say.
- Or you should say. However, in the original, this word ought is not there. And so, James doesn't give these merchants a command.

Instead, he continues critiquing their behavior. This helps us see something that's very important in this text. James is not opposed to planning.

He's opposed to planning without reference to God. Look in your Bible, and I'm going to read it without that word ought, so you get the sense of how this might have originally come to us.

[ 9 : 32 ] Instead of saying, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance.

All such boasting is evil. Instead of speaking with a humble awareness of God, mindful of his presence, mindful of his control, these merchants talk as though God doesn't even factor into their thinking at all.

And it brings to mind James' earlier words from chapter 3 and verse 5. He wrote this, The tongue is a small member, and yet it boasts great things.

That's what these merchants are doing. Their words expose their hearts. They speak as though they are in control of time and travel and the future itself.

But life is short, James says. And your presumption is arrogant. And your arrogance is evil.

[ 10 : 48 ] Why? James says they should know better. Look at verse 17. So, whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him, it is sin.

So, what is the right thing to do? How should these merchants think? How should they speak? How should they act? Well, remember the fog on the bathroom mirror.

It's there for a moment, but then it vanishes once the door opens. James says your life is like that. You need to remember life is short. And you need to remember that it is God who is sovereign.

God who is in control. Not you. James is not opposed to planning. James is not opposed to making a profit.

James is opposed to presumption. He's opposed to the swollen self-confidence that makes me big and makes God small.

[ 12 : 02 ] James turns the spotlight to a second group of people. Wealthy landowners. But I want you to notice his tone does not soften.

If anything, it gets even stronger. He sounds even more like an Old Testament prophet. Look at chapter 5 and verse 1. Come now. Listen.

Listen up. Come now. You rich. Weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches have rotted. And your garments are moth-eaten. 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.

[ 13 : 06 ] Have you ever held on to something so tightly that you were afraid to lose it? Maybe it was your favorite toy.

Or maybe it was that special gadget or teddy bear or doll or book. Something that you have that's yours and you don't want anybody else touching it.

For me, it might be a book or a Bible. Something that I'm afraid someone's going to get their sticky fingers on. Maybe for adults it's a bank account or a plan or a lifestyle that you just can't imagine letting go of.

This is what the landowners that James addresses are doing. But they're doing it in a way that harms others and blinds themselves to their own sin.

James speaks so sharply to them. Not because he hates wealth. But because James loves justice. Not because he is against storing for the future.

[ 14 : 18 ] But because he knows that wealth, the wealth of this world, is temporary. He speaks sharply. Not because he despises what they have.

But because he sees what their hearts have become. James paints a vivid, and it's almost an uncomfortable picture, isn't it?

Their riches are rotten. Like a peach that is forgotten at the bottom drawer of the refrigerator. They have more clothing than they could ever use.

And the garments that they have in storage are ruined by insects, moths. We might have our clothing ruined by mice that happen to get into a box of clothing that we have put into storage.

Even their gold or their silver. I think this is fascinating. Their gold and their silver. The things that you would expect to be intangible. The things that you expect to hold their value.

[ 15 : 30 ] James says, Your gold and silver are corroded. They are rusted through. James is not condemning success.

He is condemning self-indulgence. He is concerned about prosperity without generosity. And about abundance without accountability.

And that leaves us with a question. For adults, and for young people, and for children. What is it that I hold onto so tightly that that thing has now got a hold of me?

James says that judgment is coming for these landowners. Did you see that? You are to weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Judgment is coming for you landowners. And your rotten riches. And your ruined clothing. And your rusted savings. Those things are going to be the evidence against you on the day of judgment.

[ 16 : 43 ] And I think that last verse, that last sentence of verse 3 is likely sarcastic. As if James were saying, It's a good thing that you've stored up so much.

It's a good thing that you've saved up all of this rotten riches for the day of judgment.

In other words, there is evidence beyond a shadow of a doubt to convict them. Why does James use this symbolic, arresting, shocking language?

He wants to get their attention. He wants them to wake up. He wants them to repent. These words, weep and howl in verse 1, they connect back up to what we looked at last week.

You are to be wretched. You're to lament your sin. Take it seriously. Be honest with God about it. Why does he want them to repent so urgently?

[ 17 : 58 ] Because look what's coming next. Verse 4. Behold. Hey, hey, look at me. Listen to me, James says. 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. Do you remember the parable that we looked at this summer of the generous landowner?

This is the one from Matthew 20. Recall. Workers go out into the vineyard to work. Some go out into the vineyard and work all day under the hot sun.

And some are hired at what we would call 4 p.m. Right at the end of the day with just one hour left in the work day. They're all hired to go work in the field.

[ 19 : 08 ] And at the end of the day when it's time to pay them the generous landowner gives all of them the exact same wage. It was the wage that the first workers agreed to.

A day's wage. A denarius. The workers who were hired last with only an hour left to go they didn't negotiate. They didn't try to make any deals.

They knew I'm only working for an hour today. I'm at the mercy of this landowner but I need something to take home to my family. But at payday which was for them every day at the time of pay all of them got the same thing.

Why did this matter so much? Well because they were day laborers and that one day's pay is exactly what that family needed to get through to the end of the day.

If you pay those poor workers who only worked one hour anything less then there's not enough for their family to survive until the next work day. These self-indulgent landowners are doing the exact opposite of the generous landowner that Jesus describes.

[ 20 : 28 ] Their laborers work for them all day and at the end of the day when they come to get their wages one day's wages so that their family can survive to the next day the landowner says I don't have it.

Sorry. Come back tomorrow. Work again for me tomorrow and we'll see what happens. I'm waiting on payment from someone who I just don't have it.

And these workers can't do anything about it. The landowners are wealthy.

They're connected. They're legally protected. They're socially elite. There's nothing these workers can do. And they are using their power to oppress the poor without consequences.

We've seen this before back in chapter 2 in verse 6 James wrote this you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court and by all appearances it looks as if these landowners are getting away with it.

[ 21 : 51 ] Like nothing will ever catch up to them. But James says something remarkable that I hope catches our attention. Look at what he says.

The cries of your workers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. I think it would have been clever here if James would have said the Lord of the harvest.

But guess what? That would not have carried the same weight. he says the cries of your workers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

That title Lord of hosts it's an Old Testament title for God and it stresses his overwhelming power especially when his people feel helpless.

Ryan read it for us in Psalm 46 God is our refuge and strength a very present help in time of trouble. At the end the Lord of hosts the Lord of angelic armies the one who comes with overwhelming force on behalf of his people the Lord of hosts is with us.

[ 23 : 09 ] We also sang it in that glorious hymn a mighty fortress is our God. this is the same title that David used when he stood in front of Goliath when it seemed like all hope is lost.

David says to the Philistine you come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied.

just when it seems like there is no hope for his people when it seems like this is going to be a slaughter that giant against this guy we're doomed.

David says I'm coming to you in the name of the Lord of hosts and James says the cries of your workers the ones that you're defrauding the ones that you're refusing to pay the ones that you're oppressing their cry has reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

James is not against entrepreneurs he is not against budgeting he's not against saving for the future he's not against owning land hiring workers again not against making a profit James is against oppressing the poor he's against ignoring injustice he is against using your power your influence your sway as a shield for your corruption he is against living as though God doesn't see every single thing that you do this is why James comes after these self-indulgent landowners which is a strong language they think that God doesn't know doesn't see doesn't hear and he wants them to understand

[ 25 : 34 ] God hears those cries and he wants them to repent and I think James wants all of us to feel the weight of that the weight of knowing that God sees every single thing that we do I mentioned earlier that this passage is not addressed to the brothers and sisters like we see elsewhere in James and he's not talking to the teachers and leaders so it would be appropriate for us to ask the question then why include this at all like if you're addressing these self confident planners these merchants and if you're addressing these self indulgent landowners why include it in your letter at all why should we listen in as

James confronts the arrogant and the oppressive let's remember what James has already taught us back in chapter 1 and verse 14 each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire and we noticed last week your heart yearns jealously it pulls violently towards sin what does that mean for us today the sin that James exposes in these arrogant merchants and these oppressive landowners that sin is rooted in the same desire that is inside each of us perhaps you can think of a time when you leaned in to autonomy when you acted like you were in control when it was as though God wasn't there and was not in control and you were some kind of little

God perhaps you can think of a time when you pushed forward with an idea or an agenda or a plan and you didn't care who got hurt along the way James exposes how we pretend to be in control and then he invites us back to dependence think of it our best our smartest plans they're just finger drawings on a foggy mirror our best plans our finger drawings on a foggy mirror this text invites us to ask where am I forgetting that life is short and God is sovereign kids maybe you have planned out exactly how you thought recess or or your practice or your time with friends was going to go and then when co-op didn't go down the way that you hoped what happened inside of your heart adults we do this same thing don't we it's just bigger things

God is not opposed to our planning God is opposed to our presumption so go ahead make really good plans and then hold those plans in the open hands of faith trust God with your plans this is exactly how Jesus lived daily dependent never presumptuous always entrusting himself to the father here's an idea that you could do this week sit with your calendar I assume that for most of us that's on our phones sit with your calendar maybe you have a day planner still or a Franklin I think they're called sit with your calendar open it up this week and pray over every event that's coming up for you this week all of the things that you have planned pray over them and then trust all of your good planning to your faithful father who holds today and tomorrow and the future we can do that that would be good for us

James exposes how we pretend to be in control and he invites us back to dependence second James reveals what we crave he reveals what we crave and then he teaches us to look for a better treasure maybe you remember that nudge of envy it's the thought that pops into your head for me it sounds something like this well that must be nice it must be nice to have a drama free trouble free pain free life must be nice it must be nice when every circumstance seems to break in your favor it must be nice when every job opportunity that comes along is at exactly the right time and always moves your career forward must be nice it must be nice to have kids that are obedient and multi talented that you can post pictures all over social media it must be nice it must be nice to have a am I picking up anybody it must be nice to have a consistently clean perfectly decorated home that is always peaceful it must be nice to wear the latest trends and own the newest iPhone it must be nice to be so popular to get the best parts to receive the most important invites we all have our version of must be nice

[ 32 : 23 ] James reminds us of this riches rot and trends fade and stability and status and success they can vanish overnight happiness based on what you have in this world is temporary at best Jesus frees us from building our identity on what we have or what we don't have or what we do or what we're not doing or how we look or how we don't look and so we ask Jesus would you train me in contentment would you train me in contentment would you fill my heart with the treasures that last the good fruit of the Holy

Spirit you precious Savior your word your people your mission here's a prayer that you can pray with me this week when you feel envy rising Lord give me only what will grow me and not what will own me only what will grow me and only for your glory don't give me anything this week that is going to try to own me James reveals what we crave and he teaches us a better treasure and finally James strengthens our weary hearts with the certainty of God's justice we feel overlooked sometimes don't we we feel unseen we feel taken advantage of kids you know this feeling too when something unfair happens and no one seems to care and no one wants to do anything about it when you are marginalized when you are mistreated when you are financially squeezed!

and there is absolutely nothing that you can do remember that the Lord of hosts hears he hears your cry and he absolutely will do something about every injustice done to you until then we follow Jesus's example he knows what it's like to be crushed by the powerful Jesus is the truly righteous one isn't he the truly righteous one that James seems to point to he was unjustly condemned he was murdered we follow Jesus the words and the ways of Jesus the example of Jesus not in defeated resignation but in steady resolved hope in

James we discover that steadfastness through suffering results in the delightful gift of becoming wiser with Jesus and this wisdom is shaping us isn't it I hope it's shaping us in what humble holiness gentle reasonableness merciful goodness we're learning to make our faith visible by the words that we speak by the needs that we make by the leaders that we follow and through our lives changed by the gospel we are evidence of our good father's ongoing work of redemption we remember that as we draw near to God he is drawing near to us and so my beloved brothers and sisters may our faith not remain alone may

God give us strength and wisdom to move from presumption to dependence from envy to contentment from weariness to hope may God give us grace so that we are doers of the word and not hearers only let's pray