

The Judge at the Door

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[0 : 0 0] well in that passage of scripture that was just read to us james begins to sound like just like an old testament prophet when he speaks in a very dramatic way about the concerns that he feels that necessary that he should raise well if you would mind i know we just prayed but let's just pause again and i just want to pray god our father i want to acknowledge once again your presence in in this room that you are here and that by your spirit you are able to stir our hearts so i pray lord that we can and will recognize what it is that you want to say to us and and how it is that you want us to respond help me lord to speak uh about this passage of scripture in a way that brings you honor and that is true to what you want it to say and most of all father i pray that you'll give us hearts to obey what it is that you tell us in your word today in jesus name amen oh when the lord jesus christ came the first time he came in obscurity he came in humility the lord jesus christ will come again and his second coming will be as different from his first as you can imagine he will not come in obscurity he will come with high visibility humility he will come in humility he will come in awesome splendor when he came the first time he came born as a baby cradled in a feeding trough and was cared for in an animal shed when he returns the second time it will be to establish his kingdom the heavens and the earth will pass away they will dissolve with fervent heat and there will be a new heaven and a new earth wherein will dwell righteousness it will be the consummation of all god's eternal plans christians who understand the second coming of christ recognize that it is a very very powerful incentive to them to live as they ought to live and when we turn to this passage of scripture we discover that underlying the basic themes that james is speaking about so very forcibly is a concern that people recognize the second coming of jesus notice if you will in verse 8 you also must be patient strengthen your hearts for the coming of the lord is near notice if you will in verse 9 see the judge is standing at the doors notice also in in verse 7 be patient therefore beloved until the coming of the lord and notice in verse 3 you have laid up treasure for the last days actually i think that's better translated in the last days so the rich have laid up treasure in these the last days before christ's return and so lastly notice in verse 11 too how how james talks about the purpose of the lord which transfer translates a greek word

telos telos which can be also translated or end or end result goal and so it points uh in this way to to that end that consummation of all things so when we we add up all these things it becomes clear that james is addressing his particular concerns in the light of the return of jesus the context in which he raises them is the second coming of christ and so i submit to you we need to understand imminent return and immediate concern and these are the two things we'll talk about this evening let me refresh your memories concerning what we call the imminent return of christ which forms a backdrop to the more immediate concerns that james has in mind christ's imminent return is a doctrine that some people talk about all the time others of us speak about it less often but it is clearly part of christian truth the promise of his return is certain that's the first thing we need to underline jesus himself spoke about it in in matthew's uh matthew chapters 24 and 25 in response to questions put to him by his disciples jesus spoke repeatedly about the coming of the son of man by which he meant himself and there are there are several layers of meaning to what he was saying but it's uh clear that at least one layer of meaning refers to a time when he as the son of man will come again to judge the whole world sending some to eternal uh punishment but others to eternal life he says it even more clearly when he makes a tremendously powerful promise to his disciples at the time of their great despair when he has just told them that he is going away that he is returning to his father he says now now listen don't be afraid you believe in god believe also in me and then he explains that in his father's house there are many mansions or many rooms and that he is going to prepare a place for them in these in these in these mansions and then he comes out with these tremendously reassuring words if i go away i will come again so a theme of his teaching was that he would return in glory but more than that in his specific reassurance to his disciples in the at the time of their despair was if i go away i will come again remember too at at the time of his ascension the disciples were looking puzzled and amazed and frightened into heaven when the angels spoke to them and said you know why are you gazing up there into heaven this same jesus that you saw go up into heaven will come again in that way that you have seen him go and of course it also becomes a dominant theme of the preaching and teaching of the new testament preachers for example in one thessalonians chapter 4 paul has a very powerful expression and statement concerning the return of the lord jesus christ he says the lord himself with a cry of command with the arch angles call and with the sound of god's trumpet will descend from heaven and the dead in christ

will rise first and then we who are alive will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the lord in the air and so we will be with the lord forever therefore encourage each other with these words you don't have to look very far into the apostles teaching to see that they picked up on the theme of the triumphant and glorious return of the lord jesus christ and made it an integral part of their teaching and so we must say this the promise of christ's return is certain there will come a time when jesus will return in glory to establish his kingdom and at that time every eye will see him every knee will bow to him and every tongue will confess that he truly is the lord this is something that christians firmly believe the promise is certain however secondly we must notice that while this promise is certain the program is concealed the lord jesus himself made this very very clear he explained to his disciples in matthew 24 and other places that he was not going to reveal to them the day or the hour that he would return now there have been a lot of people that have been just dying to know they've been trying to figure it out just last year you might have heard about this there was a group of russian orthodox christians who barricaded themselves in a cave because they were convinced they had been told that the lord would return in the next few months and so they barricaded themselves in this cave to wait for his return and eventually they had to leave because one of their number had died and the smell was getting too bad and so they left the one thing we can say about these people people who are telling us when christ will return is that although they all come from different backgrounds they all have one thing in common and that is that they were all wrong we have to recognize that we don't know the intimate details of his return and that we can't with any certainty fix the time of his return have you ever wondered why that is

I sometimes do and I think well perhaps it's because god knows human nature and knows that if we knew with any certainty the day of his return well then we'd be putting off until the last minute you know getting things put right with him and so as I think about it so that would mean we would be worse off because we wouldn't lead our lives the way that he wants us to which in fact is the best way for us to live so it's because he loves us that he doesn't let us know but maybe that's to digress a bit from scripture I mean that's my idea scripture doesn't tell me but that's just what I think so maybe I should go straight to my third point and here we go back to the passage that James brings us that while the promise is certain and the program and whilst the program is concealed the practicalities of his return are compelling let me identify four of these practicalities in this passage of scripture notice first of all in verse 7 be patient therefore beloved until the coming of the Lord notice that James reminds us that it is the Lord who is coming again the word

Lord is an awesome and powerful and majestic word it reminds us the one who is coming again is the one who is in total control he is the sovereign Lord and if I believe that that he is coming again I will then acknowledge him as Lord in my life now that's common sense if I believe the Lord is coming again and I don't know when I will be then living in terms of this awesome majestic and powerful return I will be acknowledging the Lord as Lord now notice in the next verse that he says the Lord's coming is near the Lord's coming is near and if I believe that then of course

[13 : 23] I will be awaiting I will be anticipating his return somebody's thinking however will be saying hey Chris hold it a minute James wrote this 19 and a half centuries ago he said it was near then he still hasn't shown up every generation has thought he is coming in their generation he never did show up what do you mean his coming is near that's a difficult question to answer but if I didn't have any thoughts on it I probably wouldn't have brought it up I think we can look at it in this particular light you see when you think of time as opposed to eternity you've got to realize that time and eternity are only relative to each other and if we are thinking of an eternal near we can recognize what scripture means when it says a thousand years are as a day and a day like a thousand years in other words totally different standards of evaluation

Einstein developed the theory of relativity we all understand that theory don't we no but I was really encouraged the other day to discover that Einstein was asked to describe it simply if you take a young man falls in love with a young lady it flies by like a minute but if you take the same young fellow and put him on a hot plate it seems like what a long weekend no he didn't say that I said that Einstein said if you take a young man and put him on a hot plate for an hour it seems like an eternity it's all relative you see time flies when you're having fun no it doesn't it goes exactly the same speed time drags when you're sitting on a hot plate no it doesn't it goes exactly the same speed speed but the one thing is relative to the other and so

Peter is right when he says in his letter the Lord is not slow about his promise as some think of slowness but is patient with you not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance he's talking about the coming of the Lord and that coming is near it's an eternal near his coming is imminent but it's in divine reckoning not ours if we believe the Lord is coming we will acknowledge him now and if we believe his coming is near we will await his coming I read a really nice story this week told by Ray Stedman in one of his books this is what happened a little old lady in the deep south of America went into the corner store she was known as a Christian and all the guys were sitting around drinking their coffee and they used to rouse the old girl when she came in and one day they said to her do you believe

Jesus is coming again and she said and they said do you believe his coming is near and she said I sure do and they said well you'd better get home and get ready and she says I don't need to go get ready I keeps myself ready I keeps myself ready that's what the person who believes that the Lord's coming is near does he acknowledges the Lord and he waits and anticipates his return this is the thrust of what James is saying but notice also a different tone for at the end of verse 9 he says beloved don't crumble against one another so that you may not be judged see the judge is standing at the doors you see there is a very real sense that when the

Lord returns and his return is near that he will come as judge scripture tells us that all judgment has been committed into his hands and as I've had the chance to move around the world a little bit and especially move around the former Soviet Union I can say that I've seen some things that could only be described as utter injustices I mean it is terrible what happens to some people even now and even here in Australia there are cases where people are oppressed they are abused they are maltreated and in some sense then it's good to know that there is a day coming in which God as Christ will judge the world and listen will judge the world in righteousness and when he judges the world in righteousness people will get exactly what they deserve so now abused people start licking their lips and oppressed people start rubbing their hands and the underprivileged start anticipating their comeback but

[19 : 26] I say hold it now just a minute that means you as well you see every single one of us when the Lord who's coming is near returns we'll stand before him as judge and at that moment we will either know him as our saviour and lord as the one who has forgiven us and cleansed us or we'll stand before him naked without a leg to stand on utterly condemned by him the judge is at the door if I believe that to be true that the Lord who's coming is near is the judge I will seek to get right with him and I will seek to live my life obeying him now finally notice too in verse 11 where James refers to the end or the purpose of the

Lord presumably here James is not only thinking of the end result of Job experiences how he discovered that the Lord is compassionate and merciful but also of that end or that final consummation of all things as I mentioned before when God through Christ will accomplish and finish all that he started and at that moment those who trust in him will discover him to be full of compassion and mercy just as in the end Job found God to be full of compassion and mercy not looking at our sinfulness because we will be very aware of our sinfulness but holding true to his promise to forgive us those of us who trust him so if I believe that I will trust the Lord now if I recognize that he is the judge

I will seek to obey him now and if I see that his coming is near I will anticipate him now and if I know that he is the Lord I will acknowledge him now that that's the underlying theme of this passage of scripture perhaps you may be a little concerned to learn that actually that was all kind of introduction but it's an important introduction because it's the return of Jesus that is forming this backdrop to what James wants to say and if we want to understand what he's saying we have to see it in the light of the return of Christ and really what he wants to say is very very simple we can put it this way imminent return produces immediate concern imminent return produces immediate concern there are two specific concerns in fact that

James has here first of all he has a concern about prosperity and secondly he has a concern about patience so firstly let's look at prosperity prosperity we've read the passage that those first six passages first six verses of James five and it is very hard hitting he really does sound like that old testament prophet really kind of laying around himself with a large stick taking a swing at everyone in fact I think it also reminds me of James earthly brother Jesus who really took a stick to the Pharisees didn't he but here James is talking about rich people who should weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on them he's talking about how they have lived on earth in luxury and self indulgence fattening themselves in the day of slaughter how they have condemned and slaughtered innocent people who went in a position to oppose them and he really comes down hard on the rich person and we sit here and we say to ourselves well thank

God I'm not rich I've never thanked him before for not being rich but boy now am I relieved well hold it just a minute because you know this business of being rich is somewhat relative as well we live in a relatively rich and prosperous society compared to just about everyone else everywhere else in the world we are rich and so what do we say as rich people about prosperity well many of our society many of us think of prosperity as a prize to be gained as something to be aimed for and some of us would even go as far as to say that not only is it a prize to be gained but it is something that God intends us to have the pastor of a large well known church in

[24 : 49] Sydney which many of you probably know because it produces lots of music even wrote a book and he called it you need more money prosperity you see is something to aim for it's rather interesting that capitalists and communists both agree on this point you see in both capitalist and communist dogma there is the assumption that humanity's basic ills can be cured by prosperity so for example it's said that about 70% of children in the third world die within their childhood because of the effects of poverty so if you could increase the wealth of a country less children will die and you will increase the health of the country so you increase the wealth and you increase the health both capitalists and communists want this although how they achieve it may look a little bit different actually in some places like China it doesn't look very different at all and in fact there's a nice joke that I heard when I was in Russia and the capitalism you see man exploits man however under communism it's the other way around and I think many societies see see this prosperity this is as a prize to be sought after and gained however you know if we're thinking if we are thinking about this from a Christian point of view there's something else we need to factor in you see scripture unequivocally talks about prosperity as a problem maybe we need to fasten our seatbelts here because in fact now we hear some things that perhaps we don't want to hear but that James brings to our attention his earthly brother Jesus said you cannot serve God and mammon and mammon is money so God can't be your idol at the same time as money

Jesus says you'll either go for one or you'll go for the other why because he knows that there is a very real possibility that when prosperity comes becomes the dominant theme in our lives God takes a back seat now remember that prosperity can become the dominant theme in our lives in our lives for one of two reasons we don't have it therefore we want to get it or we've got it and we're not going to lose it either way the Bible warns us very very powerfully we've got to be very very careful with prosperity because if we start serving it if we let it run our lives then at the same time we cannot serve God prosperity may or may not be a prize but in scripture it certainly is a problem and we need to be on our guard against it notice four areas that James brings up he brings up the very high possibility that when prosperity becomes a dominant theme in our lives hoarding will result he says to the rich people of his day in very dramatic language your riches have rotted and your clothes are moth eaten your gold and your silver have rusted and their rust will be evidence against you and it will eat your flesh like fire he's saying this picturing that last day and notice for your wealth to rot it needs to be something like grain moth eating clothes is straightforward and silver and gold rusting is a bit strange if you know anything about metallurgy gold and silver don't rust but this is figurative language and in fact in the days when James lived these were the three main ways of hoarding wealth and so he's saying that once prosperity becomes a dominant theme in our lives we will start hoarding prosperity to ourselves and not utilising as stewards before the God who made it available to us we need to recognise that every single one of us has a deep ingrained propensity to hoard what we've got rather than to use it as a steward of the things that God has made available and therein prosperity becomes a problem now says James in the light of this imminent return of the Lord pre-evaluate your hoarding of prosperity so re-evaluate it use it well use it use it for relationship use it for the kingdom

I'll never forget how a couple of years ago I heard about a Christian in England who works in property got a really sizable Christmas bonus in the order he said between one and two million pounds British pounds and he said I'd like to give it to you guys to use to fund buildings for the church in Eurasia so please James is saying use your prosperity well in a way that you won't regret when the Lord comes again look at the second thing James talks about cheating he says verse 4 listen the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields which you kept back by fraud cry out and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts in those days in which

James was writing many of the people got their living from the land and they were so poor that if they did a day's harvesting or did a day's sowing they needed to be paid for it at the end of the day so that they could buy food for that day they had nothing stored up at all and so if they didn't get their wages that day they went hungry that night and the Old Testament and the New Testament continually hit out at people who were rich who were prosperous and were becoming more prosperous at the expense of those people that worked for them by holding off paying them because you see if they could hold off paying them then they could make a little bit more out of their capital but it was at the expense of these people who were literally going cold and hungry and it still happens today I can tell you in Eurasia there are some very very rich people and they there they swindle their workers out of pay or even simply refuse to pay them it's happened to friends of mine simply because they can get away with it that's what prosperity does do we do that maybe we do it in very subtle ways would it be true to say that when prosperity becomes our goal that sometimes our principles get a bit eroded that we begin to maybe cut people short for the sake of better profits a better profit margin a better deal and letting our prosperity becoming more important than people as in maybe we get rid of someone because they're not so profitable if we're a businessman or whatever it's fraught with danger because you see the cries of those people that we've hurt in our seeking of money will come against us on that last day thirdly he talks about indulging verse 5 you have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter

I think a day of slaughter is kind of like a big feast day and you've fattened your hearts would it be true to say that when prosperity becomes our goal there's always the tendency for us to increase our consumption let me put it to you this way as our income increases is a natural instinct now that my income is increasing that means I can simply live at the standard that I had before and give away more money or would it be true to say that as my income increases the natural tendency is for my self-indulgence to increase well you answer that I know what I'm like and I suspect that you know what you're like the tendency is that increasing prosperity does encourage increasing self-indulgence we might well ask are we a self-indulgent society here in Australia it's really interesting you know having lived out of it and then I come back in for

[34 : 45] I lived out for it for a while and then I come back in it's I notice conversations now particularly seem to revolve around things that people have bought or the food that they've just tried or the places they have been to or the real estate that they're investing in or something it's consumerism and sociologists are telling us that more and more we are finding our identity in what we own they even coined the you've heard the phrase we are what we buy and it is a tendency now that the people that we relate to best are those who buy what we buy but you know sadly our indulgence only brings us that kind of fleeting place up when we first get things but it doesn't last it's interesting again I notice even though they're a lot poorer than us people in

Eurasia there's very little depression amongst teenagers for example generally I mean even though they are struggling to make ends meet some of them they're not unhappy are we living beyond our means are we spending more than we make as a society you see it's hard to argue Australians have come to that awful position of beginning to worship at the temple of prosperity they found themselves in that awful position of becoming so self-indulgent or so prone to cheat so given to hoarding that we may not have even recognised that in the light of the coming again of Christ we have allowed prosperity to become a terrible problem the fourth thing that

James talks about here is abusing people notice how he goes on to say in verse six you have condemned and murdered the righteous one who does not resist you presumably here it's a generalised righteous person or not as some have thought a reference to Jesus the question is is there a possibility that when we become prosperous that we might be beating down the defenceless and capitalising on the underprivileged I think more and more we are realising how much the first world lives at the expense of the third when I think about that I kind of find that frustrating because it's really hard to change isn't it what do we do about it it's a bit removed from my ability to change the circumstances and that is maybe true to some extent but I have to say I'm glad that Christians are at the forefront of the many kind of fair trade schemes that there are and I am much more convicted in my need to be generous in buying from such firms

I'm glad too that Christians are at the forefront of lobbying to change our world to address that situation that gives rise to world poverty and I'm convicted of my need to keep praying for change to happen the point here is very powerful the immediate concern of James in the light of the imminent return of Christ is that we need to reevaluate what we're doing about our prosperity and we can do that very simply by asking ourselves two questions what is prosperity doing to me what is it doing to me or we can ask another question what am I doing with my prosperity has prosperity become my God or is it my servant and there is a built-in factor here it's a beautiful one

God knowing our hearts gives us that unspeakable privilege of developing a radically generous spirit in which we can begin to give sacrificially as an offering to him part of our prosperity in a counter cultural way we can begin to be radically different in our giving in our support of others around us and you know what that is it's kind of like the antidote to prosperity becoming a problem so to a very large extent I should be evaluating my structures of generosity to the Lord and to his people and to those in need I should be evaluating what I'm doing with what I've got because if I don't do that I'm going to need to check out what I've got is doing to me and that's the first immediate concern move on quickly to the second concern that

[40 : 22] James has in the light of the return of Christ that's with patience there are three words that he uses three key words in verse seven and eight he says be patient you also must be patient in verse eight he talks about strengthening your heart somewhere else translated as standing firm strengthen your hearts stand firm for the coming of the Lord is near and finally in verse eleven he talks about enduring or persevering so in verse ten as an example of suffering and patience beloved take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance so three words patience strength of heart or standing firm and endurance or perseverance and they're all related and they're all slightly different the first one patience means a self-restraint which does not easily retaliate a self-restraint which does not easily retaliate the second one standing firm is the same word that was used of

Jesus when he set his face to go to Jerusalem even though he knew he was going to suffer there he sort of resolvedly withstood the pressure that he was under and the third one was endurance and this means an attitude a temper that does not easily succumb to suffering so we have here three characteristics that James is looking for and I've noticed that sustained periods of suffering or pressure or stress tends to drive people two ways especially in Christians suffering either produces bitterness and self-pity or it produces godliness a serenity even a quiet joy that says despite the circumstances I will rejoice in the Lord you get driven to one or two one or other of those extremes my friend Anatoly is a great example actually of both of those extremes like the vast majority of people in Russia he was born to an alcoholic father and alcohol killed his father when he was 12 and so his mother was left to raise her two sons alone and then after serving in the

Soviet army on the Chinese border Anatoly returned home and he began to drink heavily and often he says that it was common for him to spend the night on a sidewalk somewhere having fallen asleep there drunk and then in 1991 after things opened up spiritually in Russia a neighbour of Anatoly's witnessed to him and Anatoly turned to Jesus and he quit drinking within a year of his conversion Anatoly along with his new young wife was sent to another town to lead a church plant there in those days Russia was a spiritual vacuum there were very few churches and the churches that did exist were anxious to send out many church planters and so from Anatoly's church alone 22 mostly new believers were sent out to different towns to plant churches now God used Anatoly in that city a church was planted and two children were born to

Anatoly and his wife but there were problems and Anatoly and his family were soon recalled home and then soon after that Anatoly's wife filed to divorce which is a very quick process in Russia and so Anatoly was left alone to raise his two young children he first went one way he was very angry with God and he quit going to church and he returned to some of his old habits every night crying out to God for forgiveness and relief of the pain that he felt and he lived in bitterness and was full of self-pity but all of that was actually before I ever knew Anatoly you see the Anatoly that I got to know was a different Anatoly Anatoly that I knew often smiled the Anatoly that I knew had a quiet joy and he was always speaking about God and God's goodness to him the Anatoly

I knew had a gentle spirit and you know what happened he went back to church and with encouragement especially of a couple people there who got around him supported him he started playing the guitar in church and leading music and then a missionary friend of ours gave him a job driving his car and looking after it and things changed see the Anatoly I knew had learnt restraint he had determined commitment and a pressure and he had learned to not easily succumb and to suffering and that story does have a happy ending not all stories do have a happy ending on this earth but as far as I know Anatoly does because after having given up nearly all hope of reconciliation with his wife after many many years apart his wife suddenly came back to the church and God did some pretty amazing things to bring her back there

[46 : 09] I might say but it wasn't easy for her or for Anatoly but in that context of that church they began to rebuild slowly a relationship and eventually they remarried not lightly they didn't take that decision lightly and although I know that their relationship is still being refined like many of our relationships marriage relationships they are still together after two and a half years of remarriage I want to say it wasn't easy for my children to be taken out of what was quite a happy childhood situation for them all and they were taken to quite a difficult and daunting place a foreign place if I had known I think if Jenny and I had known how difficult it was I doubt that we would have gone and we have prayed and prayed and prayed for our kids and I know some of you have too and I want to thank you for that because you see it gives me such joy now to see my children both my daughters actively serving

Jesus I have joy seeing my son who got quite withdrawn now coming out again God has been good I think God does honour and does give us a joy if we persevere if we are patient and you know I think in the community of believers there are some things you know you've got to ask the question why is it that some people who start off in some miserable conditions and circumstances persevere and are patient and stand fast and some just don't do that I think there are ingredients around people who are patient and who are persevering and who are standing firm that help them do that first one is hope second one is support and third one is encouragement and what does James say he says the coming of the

Lord draws nigh there's your hope support you've supported us the church supported Anatoly we receive support from the community of Christian believers and encouragement you know the encouragement is that if I've lived my life as he's called me to live and then I stand before him in that day you know what I hear the words well done good and faithful servant enter into the joy of your Lord I don't deserve that I know but God in his mercy and his compassion holds it out to me there is the assurance of scriptures there is the encouragement of the spirit within us that reminds us of the love of God at all times we have absolutely everything we need in difficult stresses in problems and in suffering why because of the Lord because of the Lord whose coming is near the imminent return the immediate concern and these are the things that we need to address as far as our lives are concerned

Amen Amen Hurri Amen für strong alto■ la God we die holy che ec e esse el un plus hit quick water mejores with Jesus whenever