



James

Catholic Scripture Study

Living under the Lordship of Christ

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

In today's fast paced society, many have become overextended in their commitments resulting in unprecedented levels of stress, depression and anxiety. In defense one may argue that "we are simply working hard to provide for our families" or "I'm a type-A personality and there's nothing I can do about it." James sees things differently. When we assume complete control of time, events, money and relationships, James calls it for what it is — arrogance. The arrogant person is in hot pursuit of self-defined goals, but in reality his feet are firmly planted in mid-air.

Pursuing our own agendas is dangerous because we will most likely miss the opportunities to serve provided for us by God, or we may simply refuse to do what we know is right because we want what we want. Whether we are distracted or consciously refuse to do what we know is right, sins of omission are serious. James warns the rich who are arrogant and boast that they will soon experience misery. In this lesson, James continues his theme of putting God's word into practice. He warns the arrogant that life is short, fragile and somewhat unpredictable. Therefore we should live our lives under the Lordship of Jesus Christ giving Him preeminence in everything.



James 4:11-5:6

4:11 Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. He that speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor? 13 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 get gain"; **14 whereas you do not know about tomorrow. 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 shall live and we shall do this or that."** 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

5:1 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 rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers 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. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you.





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Questions on the Text

Have you ever...

1. Have you ever thought, “I need to reevaluate life” after hearing of the sudden death of someone famous?
2. Have you ever made plans on the spur of the moment and later realized you should have checked the schedule?
3. Have you ever felt exasperated as you look at your future calendar commitments?

Homework

1. If you knew today that you were going to die in a month, how would your life change?
2. It is said, “If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.” What plans do you have for the next five years? Have you gone to the Lord in prayer about them?
3. Have you ever felt used by someone in pursuit of his or her own goals and aspirations? How did it make you feel?
4. James speaks of a deception in 4:14: “Whereas you do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” How does popular culture contribute to deceptions about tomorrow?
5. It’s been said, if the devil can’t get you to consciously sin, then he will simply make you too busy to have a relationship with God. What areas of your life does God have little access to right now due to your lifestyle?
6. If you had more time, what would you do with it?



Questions for Reflection

1. James 4:11 urges us not to “speak evil against one another.” On the other hand, Jesus in Matthew 18:15-19 tells us we’re obliged to rebuke privately those who sin. What is the difference between a legitimate rebuke and “speaking evil against one another”?
2. In looking at verse 12, how does a proper attitude about God help us to have a proper attitude about one another?
3. James 4:13-15 warns against planning our lives as though God does not exist. Can you think of a time you or someone you know has done this? What were the results? What are some practical ways of organizing your life with Christ as the center?





Questions for Reflection (cont.)

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4. James tells us that our attitude toward the future should be, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and we shall do this or that” (4:15). How can daily prayer help to assure that we live with this God-centered perspective?
5. If our life is like a mist, what should be our attitude about tomorrow? Name three priorities that are important today? What would the Lord say about them?
6. Some people have the attitude that Sunday is for God, but Monday through Saturday is mine. How does James’ teaching contradict this view? Also, according to James, when does making legitimate plans and purchases in life become an “arrogant” plan?
7. James 4:16 says bluntly that boasting in our arrogance is “evil.” Many people imagine that good-natured bragging is necessarily the sort of “boasting” that James warns against here. Likewise, some people fear that saying, “I’m proud of my child” is the sort of boasting James has in mind. In reality, James is targeting the deep and often quiet self-approval of a heart that stubbornly wishes to believe in its own intrinsic goodness apart from God. Such arrogant boasting may be loud but it can just as easily be sly and silently smug. How do we guard our hearts against this more quiet form of boasting?
8. James 5:4 rebukes employers who defraud their employees and assures them that the cries of the oppressed “have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.” Where in contemporary society is genuine oppression taking place? What step can you as a Catholic take to “hear the cry of the oppressed”?
9. The Church teaches that there are “sins that cry to heaven” (CCC No. 1867). Mentioned among these sins are injustices done to the wage earner. According to the Catechism (No. 1868) we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them. After reading paragraph 1868 of the Catechism, discuss how we cooperate in the sins of others and how does it relate to James 4:17.
10. Catholic theology speaks much of what is known as the “preferential option for the poor.” This does not mean that poverty automatically confers sanctity any more than wealth automatically makes one a sinner. Rather, it means that the love of God is naturally drawn toward those in the greatest need. How can we as Catholics express God’s “preferential option for the poor”?
11. Citizens of First World countries, and of the United States in particular, are enormously wealthy in comparison with the rest of the world. We often regard as necessity things that the rest the world knows to be luxuries. James 5:5 warns against luxury and mere pleasure seeking. What are some practical ways that you might cut back on luxury and use the savings to benefit somebody else?





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Questions for Reflection (cont.)

12. James 5:6 sees in the idolatrous devotion to wealth the same spirit that murders the innocent. He says to the rich man, “You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man.” This does not mean, of course, that “money is the root of all evil (including murder)”. But it does mean, as St. Paul says, the love of money is the root of all evils (1 Timothy 6:10). Can you think of ways in which the love of money (both at the individual and corporate levels) can lead to murderous sins of abortion, euthanasia and wars of aggression? How do we combat such idolatrous devotion to wealth when it seeks the life of the innocent?



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

Judging

James, like Jesus, warns us against judging (James 4:11-12; Matthew 7:1). Modern culture, immersed as it is in the dogmas of American egalitarianism, typically drinks these warnings in unthinkingly. That is because we imagine we know the rock-bottom dogmatic basis for the warnings: namely the dogma of equality and envy articulated in the immortal words, “I’m as good as you!” Our heads are stuffed full of such “rights talk” and we tend to start babbling it at every opportunity. In so doing, we tend to conceive of “rights” as assertions of our equal goodness with everybody else. But this notion of “I’m as good as you” and of asserting “my rights” (not to mention “my equal goodness with everybody else”) is, in fact, very far from the mind of the biblical writers. James warns against judging, not because we are all equally good, but because we are all equally creatures under the judgement of the True Judge. For James, to judge is not to blaspheme the god called Egalitarianism but to presumptuously take the place of the God of Israel. That is why he says, “There is one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you that you judge your neighbor?” James then condemns judging not on the modern secular basis of “rights and equality” but on the much more realistic basis that we are not only creatures, but fallen creatures all equally subject to the merciful judgment of God. His condemnation of our eagerness to judge links—significantly—his power to save with his power to judge. James says, in effect, that God is the only one who loves us enough to judge us justly. It also says (to us) “If you cannot save another, then how dare you presume to condemn them?”

The Will of the Lord

Some people have the idea that the Holy Spirit dislikes calendar books. At least, you could get that impression from the way they live their lives. Such people often talk as though the only truly spiritual actions are those which are spontaneous, unplanned, and off the cuff. All their prayers are made off the top of their heads and the only really truly “Spirit-led” worship is non-liturgical, free-flowing, and extemporaneous. Often, it is hard to even schedule a lunch or dinner date with such people. Such planning just doesn’t feel “authentic” to them. And they often cite James 4:13-15 as their reason for this blurry and aggravating formlessness. But this is to misread James.





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)



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For James is not condemning planning, but arrogance. He is addressing the “self-made man” who boastfully asserts his big plans with zero consideration for the Lord’s will. James is warning, not against sensible foresight, but against the heart that forgets God. That is why St. Paul was not being unbiblical when he made travel plans (subject to God’s alteration, of course) (Romans 15:24-29). James is not slamming planning, but reminding us that all our planning, like everything else we do, should be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). In fact, in a curious way, the refusal to plan can often be just another manifestation of the arrogance James cautions against. For the refusal to be “bound” by the schedules of other people is usually not a sign of deeply spiritual submission to the Holy Spirit, but is instead simply another way of saying “I’ll go where I want, when I want and the heck with anybody else.” This is precisely the sort of thing James is warning against. Everything, including our calendar is to be at the disposal of the Spirit, and he is not afraid of calendars and date books.

Sins of Omission

Many people conceive of sin as “doing the wrong thing.” But James 4:17 reminds us there is another kind of sin: failing to do the right thing. He recognizes that there is a middle term between the law on the one hand and the will on the other: it is called “conscience.” The conscience is the soul’s sanctuary. No one can invade it. You alone enter the sanctuary of your conscience and there you fulfill a kind of priestly calling. That is, you sacrifice whatever lower urges and impulses you might face and unite yourself, by an act of the will, to God who has revealed his wisdom to you in his law. So the law becomes your will, but not as though God were slapping handcuffs on you. It finds its home in your conscience like the tablets of law found their home in the holy of holies. The law is “written on the heart” as Jeremiah prophesied (Jeremiah 31:33). Thus, a mature “fear of the LORD” is a filial rather than a servile fear. That is, it is a fear of hurting the Father we love and not a mere selfish fear of punishment. This is precisely why James begins his letter by saying, in essence, “Don’t fear suffering. Fear offending God” and then goes on to insist on internalizing the “royal law” of God by forming our consciences according to it through obedient action. Only that way can our will be empowered by God’s wisdom to unite ourselves to him.

Sins of omission, then, are not so much “positive” sins such as lying, cheating and stealing, but “negative” sins such as failing to rebuke evil, remaining silent when truth was demanded, or sitting on our hands when we could have stopped an evil act. That is, they are the result of the failure to internalize the royal law and incarnate it in our words and acts. Many people have the vague idea that sins of omission “aren’t as serious” as sins of commission. But this is a dangerous game. To passively permit a murder is far more serious than to actively commit a theft. Likewise, to fail to employ one’s charisms and gifts for the good of the Church is to commit a serious sin of omission. Indeed, in a curious way, sins of omission are one of the principal ways that evil enters our lives, either in the form of our own sin or in the form of sin we don’t have the will to get off the couch and fight. As Edmund Burke once remarked (and James would heartily agree): “The only thing necessary for evil to prosper is for good people to do nothing.”





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)



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Catechism Connection

Referenced from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

No. 2547 “Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow.”

No. 1783 “The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.”

No. 1861 “However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave, offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.”

No. 2445 “Love for the poor is incompatible with immoderate love of riches or their selfish use.”

Family Devotions

The St. Louis de Montfort Consecration is one of the Church’s richest devotions. In this devotion we totally consecrate ourselves to Jesus through Mary. The term “consecration” comes from the word “holy” (Hebrew *kadosh*) and means that a person, place or thing is separated from the profane for the purposes of God. The consecration that St. Louis de Montfort promoted consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. Our Lady can help us focus our lives on Christ. Remember, it was our Lady who said, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).

Rome to Home

A papal quote relating to the lesson:

“Wherever Providence has placed a man, there is always more to be done for God’s cause... Beyond the family circle, professional and civic affairs offer a vast field of action for Christians who desire to work for the renewal of society. Gathered about the Virgin’s feet, docile to her exhortations, they will first take a searching look at themselves and will try to uproot from their consciences any false judgments and selfish impulses, fearing the falsehood of a love for God which does not translate itself into effective love for their brothers.”

~Pope Pius XII *Warning against Materialism* (No. 52-54) 7/2/57.





In this lesson, we observed that:

As a result of this lesson, make it your goal to place every aspect of your life under the Lordship of Jesus. Our Lady embodies this teaching perfectly. She told those at the wedding at Cana (John 2) to “Do whatever he tells you.” Using James 4:13 as an outline, submit the various areas of your life to Christ and ask him what he would desire for you. Interestingly, James statement touches on key points of life: scheduling (“today or tomorrow”), relationships (“we”), plans (“will go”), places (“into such and such a town”), time (“spend a year there”), doing business (“and trade”), finance (“and get gain”).

Always remember that Christ has the final say in our lives, even above earthly authorities, for he has purchased us with his precious blood. The Catechism says, “From the beginning of Christian history, the assertion of Christ’s lordship over the world and over history has implicitly recognized that man should not submit his personal freedom in an absolute manner to any earthly power, but only to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (No. 450).

A Message from the Authors

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God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

