

11.17.24 ~ Pentecost 26
“How Faith Transforms Our Perspective”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Isaiah 55:6-9 ^{NLT}

⁶ Seek the Lord while you can find him.

Call on him now while he is near.

⁷ Let the wicked change their ways

and banish the very thought of doing wrong.

Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them.

Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

⁸ “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.

“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so my ways are higher than your ways

and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

Leader: These Lofty Words Bring Perspective.

All: Thanks be to God!

James 5:1-8 ^{NLT}

Warning to the Rich

¹ Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. ² Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This corroded treasure you have hoarded will testify against you on the day of judgment. ⁴ For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The cries of those who harvest your fields have reached the ears of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

⁵ You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every desire. You have fattened yourselves for the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and killed innocent people, who do not resist you.

Patience and Endurance

⁷ Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord’s return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. ⁸ You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Leader: These Are Words of Important Instruction.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

All knowing God, thank you for reminding us that your thoughts are higher than our own. You know all outcomes before we do, and you go before us in any battle or life circumstance. As we study Scriptural principles in your Word, let us move far away from the sin of greed and move closer to you. Help our lives of faith transform our hearts and minds so that we resemble your goodness. Let us trust you in all we do. Lord, please broaden our perspective beyond our own needs as we open up to one another’s needs. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Well, it's kind of been another challenging week! A long Virginia BWIM Board Meeting and three days of Baptist worship, workshops, and networking was renewing. There were over 650 registered for the BGAV Annual Meeting, and two-thirds came to Northern Virginia. I had helpful conversations with my peers and learned First Baptist Annandale history from former Associate Pastor Robert Thompson, who was on staff with Bill Hales. For any of you who remember him, he sends his regards and prayers. I also connected with friends from my previous churches and Leland Seminary alums! Westwood Baptist and Convergence staff, youth leaders, and even youth group members I trained were there and we caught up. Local pastors sent their condolences about Jerry Young. The music was amazing, they filmed everything, and my committee's resolution went well. These meetings always renew my personal perspective about how God is moving in the world. We see both the miracles and the many needs of our own little community on a daily, weekly, monthly basis; but when you get a large group of churches together sharing testimonies of spreading the Gospel, discipling believers, and meeting state and international needs, it transforms one's perspective to a broader view and reminds us of God's power through his people.

Now the two passages were chosen well before the conference, so let us hear how the prophet Isaiah and the disciple James remind us of **God's** perspective. In deutero-Isaiah, remember that the location is Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. He says, people, take heart! God will deliver them home soon. He reminds his hearers that salvation is available to all; God offers his covenant of grace to anyone if

they seek him. Comfort and assurance will be answered through their prayers if they seek the Lord: “Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously (Isaiah 55:7b ^{NLT}).” James calls the people to repent and reform in order to receive God’s mercy. This is good advice for us today as well. One cannot just look good on the outside or **seem** to be committed to God, the temple, or a local church to guarantee one’s salvation. It is not just about a public profession of faith and being baptized but must be a sincere metamorphosis in one’s life. One must turn back from the ways and thoughts of sin, and then return to the Lord in every way. That faith transformation is required for pardon, and will change one’s heart, mind, and **perspective**. It will change one’s daily life rhythms, seeking God first in the morning through gratitude, praise, and personal acts of mercy, not just personal need, or prayer requests. **We must not** be the center of our lives: “⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:9 ^{NLT}).” Seek him first.

James takes a more practical view in his “lecture.” He is rather firm in this last chapter, speaking to the merchants who have made a lot of money by charging unreasonable prices and accumulating wealth (*for a rainy day, they perhaps justify*). Evil selfishness from chapter 4 is condemned even more in chapter 5 as James denounces the evil ways of hoarding one’s wealth rather than sharing it with others. Their joy of having money brings only temporary happiness; the real joy comes from sharing it with those who are in need. The language is similar to what we hear in Matthew 6:19 ^{NKJV}: “¹⁹ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,

where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” Jesus was teaching his disciples a Godly perspective rather than a human one. Our earthly treasures so rigorously acquired on earth do not matter as much as we think they do! Moths, rust, and even sometimes mold consume them, and we cannot take them with us! James compares the corrosion of metals to the destruction of sin in one’s life. Similarly, James is teaching that the accumulation of wealth to the detriment of others is sin, and sin also destroys lives and faith. Hoarding wealth distracts from God’s love and ministry.

On the other hand, sharing wealth is a joyful act! Wealth or having money itself is not condemned here but rather the greed that sometimes accompanies it. “¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains (1 Timothy 6:10 ^{NRSVUE}).” Having great wealth can sometimes lead to luxury and self-indulgence; he gives the example of fattening up sheep and oxen before a sacrifice. They do not see it coming. The slaughter of the poor, in James’ day, referred to the oppression by the rich, so this was a dramatic literary comparison.

Another potential sin from wealth comes from the human obsession to protect it and grow more; one can lose focus on God’s goals and mission for one’s life. That distraction away from God is a deadly sin. We sometimes find too that the rich have no patience for anything other than growing or protecting their wealth. They are skeptical of the relationships around them and wonder: “do they love me because of my generosity, or do they expect an inheritance?” They have little patience to build a close relationship with the almighty God or build a spiritual maturity that

comes from knowing and following Jesus. Disclaimer: there are Godly philanthropists and wealthy people who love Jesus! What James is speaking about are those whose trust is in earthly possessions rather than in Christ. Some call this the “social Gospel” or “socialist” Gospel, but I believe most pastors try to teach what Jesus taught. Yes, the poor we will always have with us, yet all our blessings come from God’s goodness. Jesus’ teachings all warn against greed, lust, and sins of the flesh. He fed the 5,000! His personal example of sinlessness, sacrifice on the cross, and lifestyle should give us direction.

James writes to warn his readers or hearers to get themselves right, to establish their hearts to prepare for the Lord’s coming. Injustice is NOT what we want to be part of when Jesus returns. God hears the cries of victims of injustice, slavery, trafficking, hunger, poverty, and inequality. We see it more today because our social systems are more transparent than in James’ day where these societal ills were hidden deliberately from view geographically, on the outskirts of a flourishing town. Even today, that occurs with tent cities in the woods, run down hotels, or trailer parks farther from town. Our passages call us to repentance; “wealth” is relative to economic status and locale. We must not let even small comforts numb us into complacency or self-sufficiency. We must trust only in God’s provision and abundance. So, as we enter the season of Thanksgiving, let us be grateful and express that gratitude to others, the New United Gospel Food Mission, ACCA, the church benevolence fund, Leland Seminary, or any other of our mission partners. Faith and especially faith in action does transform our perspective. How fortunate are we! Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for these reminders to keep our eyes upon you. Our perspective broadens if we seek you first. In a season of busyness, please help us to stay committed to the Gospel of Jesus. Encourage us to be faithful in both joy and disappointment, and to trust you in all things. Help us to find beauty in all we do and to recognize your abundant love. Keep us focused on you and sharing our lives with others. It is in Jesus' name, we pray, **Amen.**