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[0 : 0 0] The certainty of God's future judgment by Jesus of all people means that Christians, people who trust in Jesus, can live a life now of assurance and patience waiting for that day when that final judgment will be revealed.

And we can see that, I think, in verses 7 to 9, in particular the passage that we've just read. So I'm picking those verses as the key to what I'm going to say this morning. Please glance back down at the passage that you have open in front of you, and I'm going to reread verses 7 to 9.

Be patient then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

You too, be patient and stand firm. And here's the reason. Because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged.

The judge is standing at the door. Let's pray. Father God, help us by your Holy Spirit now to see that the risen Jesus will return to judge rightly.

[1 : 1 8] And please help us to live obeying and waiting for his return. In Jesus' name. Amen. You see, wherever we live and wherever we're growing up, wherever we're working, where there is no actual justice in the present, or any sign of just judgment in the future, injustice and corruption abound.

So I'll say that again, because it's a key concept that I'm going to be working through. Where there is no actual justice in the present, or any sign of judgment in the future, injustice and corruption abound.

And Italy suffers from this practical lack of just judgment, present and future. I once asked a preschool parent, so the parent of another preschool child in Jemima's class, what does it mean to be Italian?

And he said this. This is a guy who is a university graduate and someone who worked for the financial police in Italy. And he said, this is what it means to be Italian.

That the father of a preschool child will tell his daughter, you make sure that you take advantage of your friend, because when her time comes, she will take advantage of you.

[2 : 4 4] And with open mouth, I said to him, are you serious? And he said, cold, blank, hard. Yep, that's what it means to be Italian.

You see, because in a corrupt society like Italy, where there really is no guaranteed recourse to just judgment, people must look out for number one. And it's that personal level of corruption that begins at kindergarten level that grows into systemic corruption that makes some of us laugh sometimes when we think about a country like Italy or tinpot democracies somewhere or dictatorships.

Of course, there's no justice there, so there's corruption everywhere. But it's that simple. Where there is no sign of just judgment in the future, injustice and corruption abound.

Where there's no apparent right judgment, it breeds corruption. So the plumber will come to your house in December, as happened with us, and he's just making a minor repair, and we ask him for a receipt.

And the receipt is receipt number four. But he's come to your house on December the 30th. So throughout the year, he's been working in the black, and he explained it to us.

[4 : 03] You know what? For the first year of my working life, I tried to do everything by the book. I tried to observe the law. But it worked against me. And I ended up in the red.

And so I gave up trying. Because, again, in a country like Italy, where there is a basic level of personal corruption, because there is no just judgment that anyone can perceive is coming, everyone is trying to make the most of living for themselves.

But laws have to be increased in order to get that money back that's not being paid. And more laws, and more laws, and more laws. But that just makes people try and work against the system, against the system, against the system.

Where there's no apparent right judgment, corruption breeds corruption. I think you saw that last week, didn't you, in verses 1 to 6. And it's amazing what he said there. I'm not going to repeat it.

But you rich people, you oppressors of the poor. Now, why would you do that if there was justice? How could you do that if the law really worked in everybody's favor?

[5 : 14] You couldn't. But in a context, in a society, where you can't guarantee that just judgment, corruption abounds. And that's what we live, isn't it?

The rich people oppressed and took advantage of others as if no one will care for these little people. And they live as if no one is watching, as if no one will decide about them. Of course, we've got to live this way.

This is how life works. There is no such thing as justice. So I think we see there that suffering occurs when the knowledge of good and evil collides with the inability to do what is good.

So suffering occurs when we know what's right and what's wrong, but we fail to be able to do it. And we don't do it as well because we don't think anyone really cares.

So we make others suffer and maybe we rebel against suffering because we think that's the only way anything is ever going to change. We have to take matters into our own hands. But it's so clear here, isn't it?

[6 : 21] As James speaks, he says, that is not the case. That is not the case in God's world. That is not the case in God's eternity over which he has control.

And he says that Jesus' return changes and must change our perspective. Have a look. And I'm just going to run through the verses where we see this talk about judgment, Jesus coming, the judge.

Have a look at verse 7. I've read that already, but I'll read it again. Be patient then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Verse 8. You too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near.

Verse 9. The judge is standing at the door. And verse 12. Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else.

Let your yes be yes and your no, no, or you will be condemned. James is just so convinced that this will happen.

[7 : 23] He is so convinced that there is a fixed point, a moment in time when good will be shown to be good and evil will be shown to be evil. And Jesus is the one who will establish that.

Jesus himself talked a lot about being ready for the judge in the parables that he taught. But he himself, in his obedience, right to the very end, showed us that the Father is good to be trusted.

Please turn to 1 Peter chapter 2 so that we can actually hear Peter's summary of this. And it's such a beautiful summary of, I think, what James is actually talking about.

1 Peter chapter 2. And I'm going to read from verse 13. 1 Peter chapter 2. And I'm reading from verse 13. And we're talking about how Jesus is the one who actually breaks this cycle of corruption.

And Jesus showed us that there is a coming judgment and a righteous judge. Peter says, Slaves, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men, whether to the king as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

[8 : 36] For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil. Live as servants of God.

Show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers. Fear God. Honor the king. Slaves, Submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

For it is commendable if a person bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing good and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth.

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

[9 : 38] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed. What Peter is saying here is that Jesus at the cross is tempted by the voice of Satan through those at his feet who are yelling at him, if you really are the Christ, if you really are the Son of God, come down.

Show us your power. And he does, but by doing the opposite, he shows, as he stays hanging on the cross in obedience to his Father's will, that he does have a knowledge of good and evil, but he leaves the management of that in the Father's hands.

So instead of looking out for number one at that point in time, he keeps his eyes on the Father and breaks that cycle of corruption that Adam and Eve started.

They were plunked in front of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they took the management onto themselves. Jesus leaves the management of the knowledge of good and evil in his Father's hands.

And so he breaks that cycle of corruption once and for all. It's so beautiful. I've come to appreciate this so much more after living 11 years in the Italian society. Jesus is a legend.

[11 : 01] He is so pure. He is so right. He sees what is right and wrong and he leaves the judgment about that, the management of it, in his Father's hands. And for that reason, he swaps his goodness for our sin and the hostages are bought out of captivity by his blood.

Wow. Gee, that's good. That cycle has been broken and Paul says, as he speaks to the Athenians, that's the fixed future point, the risen Jesus, because he is the one who is right to judge.

Have a look in Acts chapter 17. This is the last scripture flip will do, but I'd really like you to have a look at it for yourselves, please. Acts chapter 17, and I'm going to read verse 30 and 31.

Acts chapter 17, verse 30 and 31. And Paul's speaking in a pluralistic society, in a society that is deeply religious and spiritual.

And he says this, In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, to turn back.

[12 : 18] For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. So with the resurrection of Jesus, things have changed forever.

It means that there is an eternity. It means that there is truth. It means that there is a God who judges between right and wrong because what he actually did with regard to Jesus is say, yep, you are right.

And death can't hold you down because death comes for rebellion and it's judgment. But you don't fit in that category. And you have conquered and you have won.

And for that reason, you are the one. Who can judge. That's a great encouragement, isn't it? And I'm laboring this point because we need to understand this before we get to what James is encouraging people to be like.

We've got to understand and really take on board the reality to which James is basing all his argument on. That Jesus really is alive. that not just a regular risen guy, if such a thing could be possible, but the right eternal one who showed that he could leave the management of good and evil in the Father's hands and therefore he has the right perspective to be able to judge us who fail to leave the management of good and evil in the Father's hands but need to trust Jesus as he did that for us.

[13 : 56] Because James says, the future judgment is as certain as the seasonal crop. Did you notice that in verse 7? Please glance down it again.

Verse 7. This is the same thing that Peter was talking about in Athens.

It's a dead certain. You can stake your life on it. It's coming. He's going to come back. That's good and bad. But be patient.

Be ready for that. So the challenge at this point, and this is something that we really need to sit on for just a moment.

Are we convinced of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead? I think that's the key to Christianity, quite frankly, because if Jesus wasn't risen, then whatever happened before that just needs to be discarded as a tragic joke.

[15 : 06] But if Jesus really is risen, it changes everything. Sometimes I think in our Christian lives, and maybe even when we meet together, we can do something like this. Cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, cross, cross.

Jesus died. He's paid the price. Oh, and he rose. But I think what the proposal of Christianity is, is Jesus is alive. He really is risen.

It breaks the cycle. And it validates what happened on the cross. That's the proposal of Christianity.

No other religion, no other spiritual theory sets that up. But this is the fixed point for our eternity. Are you convinced of that?

And I'm not just throwing that out as some kind of preaching device, some kind of rhetorical kind of moment. But it could be the case that we haven't really worked that deeply into our conviction.

[16 : 08] Peter and James, they weren't convinced of Jesus and they abandoned him in his hour of need. Something happened to change their lives and convince them that they needed to preach this message to their last breath.

He rose, and that's why. Talk about that. Pray about that with someone that you trust. Because if you're answering my question right now, you know, well, I haven't really thought enough about it.

I'm not super convinced. Let's work that through. That's why I'm standing before you this morning, but that's why we went to Italy. Because we really are convinced that Jesus is alive and he does have eternal life in his hands and he gives it to those who trust in him.

So it doesn't matter what we have or don't have in this life because we have everything in eternity. Now, Jesus' just judgment and other consequences is there is a just judgment that's coming and he will judge us and all people.

Sometimes it's nice to think that, yeah, those people out there, those bad people, they're going to cop it and that's good and I'm glad about that and I'm right, okay? I'm a pretty good person. But I'm afraid, actually, when I read these verses because James is saying, you too will be judged.

[17 : 25] Your behavior actually matters. The way that you respond to the risen Jesus and you live in wait for him, that matters and that's going to be called to account one day. Whew!

The Italians would do something like this. That's a big deal. It's going to bite. It's going to bite. So we want to be hearing now that this word applies to us and I'm going to go a lot faster now in this second part of my talk because our conviction comes out in how we live.

If you're convinced that really the best is yet to come and that you can put all you have on Jesus because he's good for it, that just changes everything. It really does. And so the Christian convinced of Jesus' resurrection and certain of his return to decide about all people lives differently when faced with corruption.

That Christian woman lives differently when faced with injustice. That Christian family lives differently when faced with suffering. And James notes these things and we can see this in the contrast implicit in the passage.

And I'm just going to go really probably too quickly here now but I trust it will be clear. Christians live patiently as the farmer is patient and sure of the crop.

[18 : 44] That's verse 7. We don't take matters into our own hands. We don't take matters into our own hands. I'm not saying that we have to accept everything and so I'm really not talking about a complete Christian ethic here but what James is saying is that we don't take matters into our own hands.

We actually live with great patience because our perspective is very, very long. It's eternal. It's not temporary. We don't take matters into our own hands.

Second, those who trust in the risen Jesus live waiting for his return, for his future return. That's verse 8. You too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near.

We don't abandon Jesus deciding ourselves what is right and wrong. I've already kind of underlined that considering Jesus' death and what is occurring there because he doesn't take the management of good and evil into his own hands.

In fact, he leaves that decision to the Father and there we have our life. So I think the discipline of the Christian life is actually to work out more and more starting with the word and sticking with the word what God's will actually is and I think it's probably knowing Jesus better, being really well versed in him in the Gospels and being someone who examines how he lives and how he waits for the future judgment which his Father will be responsible for including him as the judge.

[20 : 22] Third thing, followers of the risen King Jesus hold their tongues about each other. That's verse 9. Don't grumble against each other brothers or you will be judged.

The judge is standing at the door. We don't complain against each other because we know that Jesus will also judge us. Gee, that's hard, isn't it? It might sound that these things are rolling off my tongue pretty easy right now and I said that I'm going a little bit faster.

That is really tough stuff. We've been in a church, in a brethren church which really has been working against itself. The factions amongst the elders and therefore amongst the congregation have played out year after year, month after month, week after week, day after day.

And at times our waking lives, Sarah and I, have been consumed just by the anxiety and the tension that that's created. It's been awful. And the natural tendency therefore is when you're actually meeting together with other Christian brothers and sisters, maybe just in private, you have them around for dinner or whatever it might be, you just let fly, let loose.

Yeah, you know, it's safe here, isn't it? We can say it, yeah, we can, you know. I just want to tell you this in confidence how I feel about such and such. James says, don't do it. Wow.

[21 : 42] I need to repent because my tendency is actually to really to let fly. Be quite critical. That can be good sometimes, having a critical approach, a brain that kind of analyzes well, but it can be deadly at other times because it actually leads to ungodliness.

And it doesn't trust that God's actually in control of any given situation. So I take it, and this is something that I try to do more and more, I try to pray about those things before I speak about them.

And really seek the Lord's will and his conviction regarding these matters, whatever they might be. Because it's difficult, isn't it, to turn up to church on a Sunday after you've spent the previous six days just whinging about other people and playing happy families on a Sunday or not even.

Because the Lord knows our hearts and it's dishonest. And he says we'll be judged for that. And so we need to repent and practice what James is actually calling people to do here. Christians are certain of Jesus' risen goodness even in the face of suffering.

Verse 10. Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

[23 : 01] The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Job is the example there. And we know, don't we, from our understanding of his own travails that he was pressured to call God's goodness into question.

And in fact, his mates, at one point, they say, curse God and die. That was the final point almost that he got to.

Just do that, mate, and finish it. Get it over and done with. God's not good. Forget about it. Take your own life. Job refuses. He doesn't do it.

And here, it's really interesting because James underlines the Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Because that is our big question in the midst of suffering, physical suffering, spiritual suffering, suffering as a church.

Is God good? Is he merciful? Is he compassionate? And multiply it, multiply the angst that we might have experienced in Chatswood by a million times in the experience of our brothers and sisters in Christ in other places where even just to name Jesus is to sign your own death sentence.

[24 : 22] Is God really good? I have the image of those guys who were beheaded on the beach by ISIS and the last thing that they were uttering is that Jesus is Lord and Christ towards that effect.

I think that's what James is exhorting us to. A life that understands that God has revealed his full mercy and his compassion in the Lord Jesus Christ not only as he hangs dying in our place in full obedience but in his risen glory and power.

God is good, he is merciful, he is compassionate, he will save those who trust in him. Wow, that is really good. So it's worth waiting for, isn't it? Because God has showed this to Job, he showed it to Jesus and so we continue knowing, living and waiting for that truth.

We live in it but we're waiting for the consummation of that. It changes my perspective as I think about that. And the last thing, followers of the risen Lord Jesus verbalise trust in him, not in idols.

Verse 12, above all, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else, let your yes be yes and your no, no or you will be condemned. I grew up reading Asterix and Obelix.

[25 : 35] I love those cartoons, those books. Learned a lot from them. Been very helpful actually, going to Europe after growing up on Asterix and Obelix but they, I'm not sure if it's them or if it's the Romans at times they're swearing by Tartatus.

You know, they have all the different gods and they name. In Italian, an expression would be per forza, by strength. And it seems like a banal kind of a thing when we're letting these kind of phrases roll off our tongue.

But they do actually have historical time, historical meaning, historical consequence but also eternal consequence because in those little moments of expressing those things, we are expressing where our trust is based.

where our trust is based. But Christians can speak simply relying on Jesus' strength. That's why James just says just let your yes be yes and your no be no because the strength of, the eternal strength comes from Jesus.

It's in him. It's not in something that proposes to take his place. So in all of this, I think it's quite easy actually to have a Christian witness.

[26 : 53] So I just want to give a tiny, tiny example of, I think, how easy it is to put these things into practice and not only live the difference but show the difference. I remember in my working life, especially when I worked as the studio manager in a graphic design studio, it was just so easy to stand out if I just watched what I said.

If I really sought to honour Jesus with my lips and didn't join in perhaps the way other people would speak, I'd be present but not saying the same things that they said.

I'd be seeking to live knowing that Jesus would be my judge, not them, even though they judged me often. But my point of reference was eternal in him and not based on what they would think or what they would say.

So I think the Christian life is actually living to respond to Jesus and not react to other people, if I can put it that way. And I think that's what James is saying here. We must have our eyes fixed on Jesus so that we're responding to him and not reacting to others.

And I'll tell you about the significance of that in just a moment. But I think as the church does that, as the church does seek to be ready for the future judgement, it will be poorer and more marginalised than it actually is.

[28 : 13] Because if you keep asking the plumber for a receipt, he doesn't come back to you anymore. That's a word of testimony. He don't come back because he doesn't want to be convicted of his own sin and he knows he can't live that way, giving a receipt every time.

He doesn't come back. That's just a very small example. But I think if the church does live the way that James is calling it to, it will live more abundantly than it does.

It will live more abundantly than it does. I'm not sure if you remember how the first Christian community at the end of Acts 2 is described. They have everything in common. They lack nothing.

Why? Because they're convinced that God has eternity in his hands in the Lord Jesus Christ so they are free to live in the present, loving others.

And they do it. I don't think we're meant to dwell on how they live there but I think we're meant to go back to what they were understanding that freed them to live the way they lived.

[29 : 23] So I think the church as it actually takes James seriously, God's word seriously, lives more abundantly than it does and it becomes the oasis of love, hope and trustworthiness that every person longs for.

So when people see the church of Jesus Christ actually on about him and ready for future judgment, people want to come in and be part of that.

And here is another word of testimony. I'll embarrass Jemima, our first daughter, second child. She came into junior high, middle school out of a different primary school so she found herself new in her class and there were a number of girls who were really keen for her to be friends straight away.

And it became apparent pretty quickly that they just wanted to use her, really her presence and her new friendship and not only would that be harmful and hurtful to Jemima but the way they behaved amongst each other wasn't good for them either.

So if I can put it this way, it was just their corruption, their personal corruption, looking out for themselves, for each other and trying to use each other that swept her up and hurt them.

[30 : 38] But as that became clear to Jemima and we wrestled with it as a family, she decided that she wouldn't be like them. And as a result of that, and I praise God for the way she acted in this, as a result of that, I think there were moments of loneliness.

But what happened was she acted in a way that was faithful, that was not going to be moved or swayed by what other people thought or did and she actually became a point of reference for other girls to leave that friendship group and become her friend.

So the righteousness, I think, in her behaviour and finding her identity not in what the others thought of them but, I pray, fixing her eyes on Jesus, it meant that her actions were used to free those girls from the trap that they found themselves in.

And so they started just to create a new friendship group that was based on trustworthiness, reliability and love because it started with Jemima's actions.

I think there's an image there of what the Christian church has actually been called to be and we need to work hard on practising it amongst ourselves here, first and foremost. So we've seen that the basis of our behaviour in the present is the certainty of God's right judgement in the future with the risen Jesus.

[32 : 00] He is alive. He is very good and he will judge. So let's re-read the passage just to conclude listening for James' certainty that Jesus lives.

Be patient then, brethren, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near.

Don't grumble against each other or you will be judged. The judge is standing at the door. Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth or by anything else.

Let your yes be yes and your no, no or you will be condemned. He stands at the door. He listens. Jesus is present.

[33 : 05] Jesus will return. James was sure. And Italians need the love and the certainty of that judgment to free them from this vicious cycle, downward cycle of corruption that kills in the present and in eternity.

Let's pray. Father, please help us to examine our own convictions this morning of Jesus' resurrection. resurrection. James was sure. He had seen the risen Jesus and that changed his life, not only for the present but for the eternal future.

Please help us to be like him. Please help us to be convinced not only of that eternity but the rightness of the judgment that will come. And so we ask that you'd help us to get ready today.

And we pray not just for ourselves but for those who will see the church in action as it bows the knee to Jesus washes its own tongue, loves others, really does wait with great expectancy and certainty of Jesus' return so that we might actually proclaim your freedom, Father, in Christ and that other people might come into it too.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.