

Patience and Suffering

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Date: 27 April 2014

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[0 : 00] Please turn to James chapter 5. We're going to read from James chapter 5 and also before that from chapter 1.

Chapter 5 is page 1013, I think, in your church Bibles. But I'm going to read first a few verses from chapter 1. What we'll find is that at the end of the letter in chapter 5, James returns to some of the ideas that he raised right at the beginning in chapter 1.

So let's remind ourselves of chapter 1, verse 2. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

[1 : 13] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Look on to verse 12.

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial. For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Now turn over to chapter 5, verse 7. And note the recurring theme of patience and steadfastness. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged.

[2 : 21] Behold, the judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remain steadfast.

You've heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you've seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brothers, do not swear either by heaven or earth or any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

This is the word of the Lord. Patience, they say, is a virtue.

Patience is one of those things which is urged on us from our very youngest years. Ever since you were a small person, I imagine, your parents have encouraged you to be patient.

You've gone past a shop window, seen something you'd love to have. Mum, can I have that? Dad, can I have that? They said, well, you can save up for it. If you wait patiently and save up, you'll enjoy it more when you get it.

[3 : 41] Do you remember that one? And you thought to yourself, I'm pretty sure I could enjoy it quite well already, right now. Patience is a virtue, your friends have told you, to your irritation as you've expressed your longing for something.

Good things come to those who wait, they say. And you've thought, I don't want to wait. I want it right now. Well, we're at the beginning of the end of James's letter.

And he starts, 5, 7, be patient, therefore, brothers. And that is very much the theme of the whole of this opening part of his conclusion.

Verse 7, be patient, therefore. Verse 7 again, see how the farmer waits, being patient about the harvest. Verse 8, you also be patient.

Verse 10, as an example of suffering and patience, brothers. Verse 11, the patience, the steadfastness of Job. We are to be patient, waiting for the Lord's coming.

[4 : 48] Patience, of course, in life is often just a matter of hanging on until something happens. There are two kinds of patience, though.

There's the just hanging around for something to happen patience, and another kind. Let me illustrate. Think of waiting for things to arrive in the post.

You're waiting for a letter. You don't have to do much to wait for a letter. It's going to come. You don't have to do anything to prepare for it, for on the day that it will come, it will fit through the little hole in the door.

And whether you're there or not to receive it when it arrives, it will be there waiting for you on the mat when you get home. You don't have to do anything. Think, however, about another sort of delivery.

Think about waiting for a large parcel, say, a new sofa or something really large like that. That is a different kind of waiting altogether. You still have to do the time, but you also have to organize your life around it, because it won't fit through the little hole in the door when it comes.

[5 : 57] You have to arrange for someone to be in if the delivery is going to go well. You have to reorganize your life to do that kind of waiting. Some sorts of patience need changes in life.

And that is the kind of patience that James is urging on his readers. The organizing your life around the thing you're waiting for kind of patience.

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Waiting for the coming of the Lord is not like waiting for a letter to arrive.

You just get on with stuff and one day, oh, there it is on the mat. No, it's something altogether more active than that. We've already had some of that activity in chapters 4 and 5.

The bit we looked at last week, the preceding section, has talked about some of the basic building blocks of everyday life. How you speak to people, how you go about planning for the future, what you do with the money in these last days of gospel opportunity.

[7 : 05] Waiting patiently for the coming of the Lord involves activity in all of those areas. And so James says, at the end of them and the start of a new section, be patient, therefore, brothers.

Spend these last days in the right way. And exactly the same emphasis on active waiting is seen in this little section.

Here, waiting patiently for the Lord's return is going to mean doing things, especially things to do with, surprise, surprise, speech.

It won't be a surprise to you if you've been with us in James already, because speech is one of his big things. This little section is full of speech. Verse 9, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged when the Lord comes.

Verse 10, an example, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Verse 11, Job. We'll see in a moment that Job is used because he too is an example of speaking in a certain sort of way.

[8 : 18] Verse 12, do not speak in certain ways, do speak in other ways. Speech runs all the way through this little waiting section. In this section, patient waiting for the Lord's return and speech are brought very, very close to one another.

And if you've been with us in James, you'll recognize this method. All the way through the letter, he brings relationship to God and behavior towards people very close together.

Here, you cannot be waiting rightly for the Lord's return if you are not speaking rightly to people.

They go together. Now, here we get to the pointy end of the stick.

For these people, holding these things together, the Lord's return and speaking to people rightly is going to be very hard.

Why? Because bad things have been said and done. And when unkind and malicious things have been said and done by Christian brothers and sisters, by people who ought to know better, it is sometimes very difficult to wait patiently and to speak rightly.

[9 : 41] This letter started off, turn back to chapter 1, with the subject of trials. Chapter 1, verse 2. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.

Things that test your faith in God. And, says James, God will use the trials of life, verses 3 and 4, to perfect his people.

So, verse 12, endure patiently to the end, till God gives you a crown of life. Now, back to chapter 5.

When you get back to chapter 5, we're again on the subject of patience. Be patient, therefore, brothers. We start the letter with patient endurance. We end the letter with patient endurance.

In between, believers behaving badly. Friends, one of the greatest tests of faith in God is the behavior of fellow believers.

[10:52] If the world outside treats me badly as a Christian, it's not a big surprise. But, if one of God's people treats me badly, that can be a huge test of confidence in God.

These are the people God associates with. They've done this. What does it say about him? That he lets that sort of thing go on. What does it say about him that he's willing to overlook that kind of behavior among his people?

Does he not care? Does he have no sense of justice? Patient, confident waiting for the Lord's return is very hard when bad things have been said and done among God's people.

Now, this week and next, we're dealing with that issue. How to wait patiently for the Lord's return despite the difficult reality of people having behaved badly.

This week, part one of that. And we're going to look at the big idea and then some encouraging examples. The big idea is simply this.

[12:01] Wait patiently. Don't grumble. It will be worth it. Verse 7. Be patient. Be patient. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also be patient.

Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door. Wait patiently.

Don't grumble. It will be worth it. The waiting patiently is there in verse 7 and it's there in verse 8.

And they don't grumble, but it's there in verse 9.

Notice that both the waiting patiently and the not grumbling are linked to the Lord's coming. Verse 8.

Be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

[13:04] Verse 9. Don't grumble so that you may not be judged. The judge is standing at the door. In difficulty, it is very easy to think, how can I possibly keep enduring this?

The Lord is never coming. When having to deal with bad behavior, it is very easy to think, some sort of justice must be done now.

I'll hit back. I'll forget that the judge is coming. And I'll forget, of course, that not only will he judge what's been done to me, he'll judge what I do to others as well. The Lord is coming.

Wait patiently. Don't grumble. It will be worth it. Now, the it will be worth it bit is in the illustration in verse 7.

Let me read it again. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it until it receives the early and the late rains.

[14:09] You also be patient. It's an agricultural illustration. Now, I guess not many of us are farmers, but it's not a difficult picture. What does a farmer do?

Well, he works hard enough. He doesn't just sit back and do nothing. That's not the route to a harvest. Any farmer knows that.

No, a farmer does all sorts of things. He plows. He harrows. He sows. He waters. He weeds. He scares the birds off from time to time. But pretty foundational to the work of farming is waiting.

There is stuff the farmer just cannot do. It doesn't matter how hard he works. He cannot make it rain. He cannot make seeds grow either.

They just do their very growy things when they get wet. But the farmer's got no control over that.

The truth is that all over the world, even today, farmers everywhere know that they cannot, by their own efforts, guarantee a harvest.

[15:16] They have to wait patiently. Be like the farmer, says James. Yes, it will involve activity. Verse 8. Establish your hearts.

You'll have to strengthen yourselves. Verse 9. Don't grumble against one another. There is activity in the waiting. But patient dependence on God is absolutely at the heart of it.

Jesus. His return. And that alone will make everything happen as it's supposed to.

Jesus. His return. And only that. will make everything happen as it's supposed to. He will straighten everything out in the end.

He will do everything right in the end. He's not less just than we are. He knows precisely all the hurts that need to be straightened out.

[16:18] He will open the door. He says. You may not think it possible that you will ever get over things that have been said or done to you.

You may not be able to see how on earth you can possibly put the anger and bitterness behind you that results from the things that have happened to you.

You may not be able to understand how you can possibly restrain your speech against somebody again for another day or another week.

But Jesus' return will straighten everything out. You hitting back now won't do it. Getting justice now won't do it.

Taking revenge now, that won't do it. Jesus' return is the only thing big enough to put right the bad things that have happened to you and to me and to everyone else.

[17 : 21] Wait patiently like the farmer. The farmer knows the rain is coming. That's why he waits. The early and late rains come every year where James is writing.

But when it's not time for rain, of course the sky is clear and cloudless and it doesn't give a hint that it's going to rain again. And it doesn't look as though anything is going to grow because where's the rain coming from?

It's hot and dry. But a farmer in that part of the world doesn't stop work just because he doesn't see the rain yet. He knows it's coming.

And so he works in light of it's coming. In the same way, even though it does not look like it now, the Lord will return and justice will be done and every single thing will be straightened out.

And even though your attempts to wait patiently and put hurt and bitterness behind you seem fruitless and pointless and much too big for you to manage.

[18 : 31] In the end, precious fruit will result from that. Strengthen your hearts. Strengthen your hearts, says James.

Don't grumble about one another. He will mend everything when he returns. It will be hard in the meantime. Great patience will be required.

But don't let your behavior be determined by the hurts of this present age. And don't let your behavior be determined by the fact that you can't see the judge coming yet.

There's better to come. Because God has promised it. So live as though his promise is true. Wait patiently. Don't grumble.

It'll be worth it. Precious fruit will emerge in the end. Though you can't see any of it right now. Now that is the big idea in this concluding section.

[19 : 31] And I think it dominates the whole of chapter 5 actually. And we'll be looking at a big chunk of that next week. But for the moment. Let's look at verses 10 to 12.

Because in these verses. James gives two examples of patience in suffering. That turned out to be worth it in the end. Two examples of patience in suffering.

That were worth it. Example number one. The prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Verse 10. As an example of suffering and patience brothers. Take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Behold we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. Remember the prophets. Says James. If you want an example. They spoke the Lord's message.

We look back on them now. And we know they did the right thing. And we know that there's no way that God will ever forget. Their bravery and their faithfulness. At the time of course.

[20 : 30] It was no fun at all. Being a prophet. Speaking the word of the Lord. Jesus tells a story to illustrate Israel's history. Of a man building a vineyard.

And planting vines. And putting tenant farmers to rule over the vineyard. And to work it. And every so often. The owner sends a messenger to the vineyard. A prophet. To remind those tenant farmers.

To send some of the fruit of the vineyard. Back to the owner. And he tells of how the prophets were stoned. And beaten. And some of them killed by the owners of the vineyard. The truth is.

That at the time. God's messengers. The prophets. Were hated. By those who they were sent to. It was no fun being one. I used to work in East London.

At the London Hospital. In Whitechapel. And on Whitechapel High Street. Just outside the London Hospital. Is a statue. Of William Booth. The founder of the Salvation Army. When William Booth was alive.

[21 : 28] They absolutely hated him. When he was dead. They put up a statue in his honor. It's the way it goes in this world. James says. Remember the prophets. They spoke the truth about God.

But everyone knows. It was very hard for them at the time. We consider them blessed. Because we know they did the right thing. Speaking for God. We know that it's absolutely impossible.

That God would fail to vindicate their work. Remember them. As an example. Why is this example used? Because it might be hard.

For James' hearers. To keep speaking with integrity. In a hostile climate. Such as is described in this letter.

It is however. The right thing to do. Second example. Job. A man who spoke rightly about God. In the middle of intense suffering.

[22 : 29] Now you probably know the story of Job. He's a good man. Not a perfect man. But a man right with God. And he finds himself. A player in a heavenly drama.

That he's only barely aware of. And he suffers greatly in the process. He loses everything. He loses his family. His fortune. His home.

And especially his health. He doesn't know why he suffers. And he never learns. Why he has suffered. He suffers not only physically. His greatest sufferings.

Come from the words spoken to him. By those closest to him. His wife. Thinks trust in God. Should be abandoned. She tells him to curse God.

And die. His friends. Cruelly assume. That he must be in this situation. Because he's harbored some secret sin. He's done something wrong.

[23 : 26] Job. Job on the other hand. Knows that this is not the way God operates. And despite the fact that he never learns. Why this particular calamity has come his way.

And despite the fact that he is often beside himself. With anguish. And raw emotion. He never lets go. Of a true picture of God.

And at the end of the book. He is commended for that. Turn back please in your Bibles. To Job chapter 42. It's on page 446.

I think. In the church Bibles. Job chapter 42. Right at the end of the story. Verse 7. In the end.

God speaks to Job. And Job answers. Verse 7. After the Lord had spoken these words to Job. The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite. One of Job's friends.

[24 : 28] My anger burns against you. And against your two friends. For. You have not spoken of me. What is right. As my servant Job has.

Now therefore. Take seven bulls. And seven rams. And go to my servant Job. And offer up a burnt offering. For yourselves. And my servant Job. Shall pray for you. For I will accept his prayer.

Not to deal with you. According to your folly. For. You have not spoken of me. What is right. As my servant Job has.

Twice we are told. That Job has spoken of God. What is right. Now turn back to James chapter 5. Do you see Job too. Is an example.

Of somebody who speaks right. In difficulty. Even in all.

[25 : 23] That he suffered. He trusted what he knew. Of God's character. He did not allow. His view of God's character. To be extinguished.

By his sufferings. He held to what he knew. Was true. Though he did not see the purpose. And he did not understand. What God was doing in it.

Now can I just. Make an aside for a moment. Many of us. Will suffer. Badly. In life. We do not learn. The purpose. Of the suffering.

From the suffering. Itself. Sometimes Christians. Say to one another. I'm sure God will teach you. Good things through this. And we think to ourselves.

Well perhaps. But I cannot see anything good. That I've learned from this yet. And sometimes. That kind of comment. Makes people in suffering. Feel even more unspiritual. Than they feel already.

[26 : 18] Because they can't. One. They're having a bad time. And two. They cannot discern. The purpose of it. That kind of comment. Is on the whole. Unhelpful. We do not learn.

From the suffering. What God is doing. Through the suffering. We learn. From the Bible. What God is doing. Through the suffering. We don't have to work out.

What God is teaching us. By looking at. What is happening to us. That is a terrible burden. In fact. That's precisely the burden. That Job's friends. Lay on him. This suffering.

Job means. That you have something. To learn about your sin. And of course. It meant nothing of the kind. No. We learn what God is doing. With suffering. From the Bible. Not from the suffering.

God has told us. What he will do with it. In the end. Job did not let. His terrible circumstances. Or the words. Of those close to him.

[27 : 14] Override. What he knew. To be true. About God. And that is precisely. What James has been. Urging on his hearers. All the way. Through the letter. Difficulties.

And trials. In life. Test your confidence. In God's character. Says James.

Hold on. To what you know. To be true. Do the Job thing. Trust God. And keep going. Even though the suffering. Continues. And circumstances.

Don't change. Job refused. To believe. His friends. He kept holding on. To a true picture. Of God. When his friends.

Gave him. A different one. To explain. His circumstances. And. He was rewarded. For doing it. Now of course. Job's reward. At least. In the book.

[28 : 10] Is in this world. He received. At the end. Back again. All his cattle. And houses. And daughters. And sons. And all. All that kind of stuff. That he lost. Now that is not. What God promises. Through James.

James. But James. Uses this example. Of how God. Vindicated Job. In the end. To show. How God. Can do the same. For those in difficulty.

In this age. God. Is full. Of compassion. And mercy. Verse 11. He says. God. Had a purpose. And it was a compassionate.

And merciful one. Even though. The experience. Was dreadful. Few things. Are a bigger test. Of our trust. In God's character. Than when God's people.

Treat us badly. For Job. For a while. It did not look. As though God.

[29 : 06] Was full of compassion. And mercy. And Job's friends. Was certainly not full. Of compassion. And mercy. Why did James's readers. Need this example.

Well. Because they have not. Behaved with compassion. And mercy. Towards one another. But James. Reminds them. That God's people. Are not God.

And Jesus. Is coming. As surely. As the early. And late. And late. Reigns. Jesus. Is coming. And because of that.

Says James. Verse 12. Do not swear. Either by heaven. Or earth. Or any other oath. What on earth. Does he go on. About that for. Well. Many.

Many. Many. Many. Practical applications. Have been taken. From verse 12. Things like. How illegitimate. It is for Christians. To swear. Oaths in court. And that kind of thing. But that. I think. Is not what this.

[30 : 01] Is talking about. What James. Is talking about. Here. Is the sort of speech. That so often. Categorizes. The way we talk. To one another. When we have to.

Emphasize. To one another. When we are really. Speaking the truth. I really mean it. And what that means. Of course. Is. Much of the time. I don't really mean it. What James says.

Is. Let your yes. Be yes. And your no. Be no. Don't be a deceptive. Talker. Don't say things. And not mean them. Don't. Say things. And not mean them.

So when you really mean them. You have to say. I really mean them. Be truthful. It's simple. Don't grumble. One another. Don't talk negatively. Towards one another. Don't be deceptive.

With your speech. All the applications. Are in the area of speech. I take it. Because that's where the harm. Has been done. We do most of the harm. That we do. By speaking. Be truthful.

[30 : 58] Generous. Patient. Why? Because Jesus is coming. He knows everything.

He is a completely. Just judge. He is well. Able to mend. Everything. Even the things.

We think. That can never be mended. He is able. To deal with the hurts. The injustices. The false accusations. The poisonous words.

The damage. Caused by God's people. To one another. He is able. To deal with it. He knows. All about it. All about it.

Every single thing. About it. He knows. And he loves it. When people hang on. To what they know. To be true of him. Even when his intervention.

[31 : 56] Looks as likely. As rain. In a desert sky. He is coming. He will judge. Those who continue. In malice.

He will vindicate. Those who hold on to him. Be patient. Therefore. Says James. Let's pray together.

Let's just have a minute. To respond. Quietly. Ourselves. To what God has said. Strengthen your hearts.

For the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble. Against one another. Brothers. The judge. Is at the door.

So often.

[33 : 17] Heavenly Father. Our. Thoughts about you. And our responses to others. Are driven merely by the things that we can see.

And so often. The truth of Jesus return. Seems distant. And.

Insignificant. For the needs of the day. Help us to remember. That. The coming of the Lord Jesus. Is as the certain. Is as certain. As the coming of the rains. Is. In the place. Where James is here. Is lived. Help us. Therefore. Even though we might not see.

His coming yet. Not to behave. As though it's not coming. Not to behave. As though words don't matter. We pray.

[34 : 15] We pray. We pray. That our. Thoughts about you. Might be governed. By what you've said. Rather than. By what we see.

Have mercy on us. We pray. May your truth. Take root. In our lives. Pray that we might.

Give ourselves. Patiently. To what will result. In a harvest. In the end. Hear us. We pray.

For Jesus sake. Amen.