

James: Faith Works

Be Patient!



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James 5:7-12

These verses go with the previous two messages we preached in James. So this is not a new topic but he is now going to give us some very practical application. Let me just remind you of the big picture. The church that James is writing to is being oppressed. They would look at themselves as the 'have nots,' and they are being oppressed by the 'haves.' Now, living in America and being raised in America, we can't imagine being a "have not" or being oppressed by the 'haves.' If you remember the last message, we were speaking to rich people and we all fit the category of being rich, but I think there are times when you and I feel like life is not fair. Agreed? I think sometimes we just have this thought that this shouldn't be happening to me, or I shouldn't have to be doing what I am doing. We feel like somebody else is causing our circumstances to be what they are. If you have ever been in that situation, this is what this sermon is talking about. Listen to what James says to me and you.

Scripture

"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. Don't grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; 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 remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. But above all, my brothers, don't swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

Six times in these few verses, James is going to speak of some form of being patient. I kind of get the thought that James believed the people he was writing to may have struggled with being impatient. Sometimes we don't think of ourselves as impatient people until we get into certain circumstances. Have you ever complained about fast food not being served fast enough? You might be impatient. I remember the time I asked the Lord to make me more patient, and the next three fast food restaurants I went to, I promise you, the lady taking my order was being trained! I suddenly realized that I was not as patient as I should be. Have you ever been sitting at a red light? The light turns green, but you are the second automobile and you just have to honk because the person in front of you delayed a split second? And we sure can't be delayed a couple of seconds at a red light when the red light turns green! Have you ever just *had* to pass that combine or tractor on that two lane road with double yellow lines and you almost get hit three times pulling out? We just can't believe they let tractors on highways! There are just times when all of us get in situations where our circumstances reveal we aren't as patient as God would want us to be, but we aren't talking about things like that. James is

writing to a church where many people in the church are working for rich people who are unbelievers and part of their wages is being held back. They aren't being paid what they are worth. Do you know what James says to them? He didn't say get another job, he didn't say join the union, he said be patient.

The word for patient here is the Greek word, "*Makrothumia*." It is a compound word that means to suffer long. James is trying to go back to what he started this letter with and that is an admonition to the church reminding them that when trials and tribulations come their way, they need to count it all joy because God is probably behind that trial or tribulation in some way. Ultimately, he is using that trial or tribulation to produce Christian maturity in them so that one day they will be just like Jesus Christ. How would our life be different if we viewed life through the thought that the circumstance we are in is either being caused or allowed by our God and it ultimately has a purpose? Therefore, James says be patient. The opposite of being patient is to be short-tempered. You aren't worth your salt when you lose your temper. You realize that, right? So therefore, James says don't be short-tempered, be long-tempered. James says have that ability to suffer with people and go the distance with them. Because God is not giving up on us, we aren't going to give up on them. You say, "For how long?" Are you ready for this? Until the coming of the Lord. Wow...UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD! So basically, if I am understanding this right, as long as I am a believer on this earth, God wants me to be patient and not impatient.

James gives us an example of patience and he draws on the life of a farmer. He talks about how the farmer has to wait patiently for the precious fruit of the ground. The agriculture situation here is not Western Kentucky's it is Israel's where they depended on early rains and latter rains. The early rains came in October and November after they had planted their seed, then the latter rain came in March and April. Right as that plant was producing the fruit it had to have the latter rain in order for the grain to fill out and produce. So, here is the farmer in Israel sowing his seed. The ground is dry. He has done all that he can do, it's now out of his hands. He

sowed the seed and the circumstance is out of his control. Now, James is writing to Israelites who have come to faith in Christ who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire, and here is what he knew — God had promised Israel as a nation in the Old Testament that if they planted the seed He would send the rain, early rain and latter rain, but the farmer had to wait. Just as soon as he got the early rain and the seed germinated and it began to grow, he now has to wait for that latter rain. When that latter rain comes, there will be the harvest.

If you aren't a patient person, you will not survive as a farmer. Can you imagine putting seed in the ground and then having to wait seven to ten days to see if it germinates and will start to grow? Then you wait months for it to grow and mature. It just seems like it is a life of waiting. I promise you, if we surveyed the farmers in here, there were times the farmers got impatient and didn't wait until the soil temperature and the soil moisture was just right, and they planted and... disaster. You see, what James is saying is when we are impatient rather than patient we have this tendency to want to take matters into our own hands. James says no, be patient.

Now, let's keep the context. The context is here is a group of people who are being oppressed. James is telling them to be patient in their oppressed circumstance because they have something to look forward to. What they have to look forward to is the coming of the Lord. One of the biggest mistakes that we make as Christians is we keep our eyes only on the right now. Sometimes we forget that we aren't the people of the right now only, we are the people who believe that right now counts forever. There are just some things that we patiently suffer through for the benefit of others because we are waiting for the coming of the Lord.

I had a thought this week. James is writing to a group of people, who I believe, many of them actually saw the Lord. They were with Him. They heard Him tell that He was coming back. Can you imagine being one of those people who saw Jesus, who got to know Jesus? Can you imagine being one of those people who depended on Him to do things for you that you couldn't do for yourself — then all of a sudden He is gone, but He has

promised that He is coming back? I think you would be looking for Him to come back. I think you would probably live everyday of your life wondering if this was the day He was coming back. They knew just as Jesus ascended from the earth to Heaven, one day He would come back in the same manner. So, I have a feeling that the early church didn't live with their head down, but they lived with their head up expecting Christ to come at any time. Can I be honest? I don't think you and I do that. I think one of the reasons is because we have never seen Him. We know Him by faith. We know He is coming back, but we don't expect Him to come back this afternoon. See, what James is trying to get the church to do is to get their mind off of their oppressed condition and to understand and wait for things to be made right. But things will not be made right ever down here; things will only be made right up there. That is why we aren't seeking an earthly kingdom; we are seeking a heavenly Kingdom. That is why we as a church don't lose our patience.

Has the coronavirus made any of you impatient? It really just revealed that we were impatient. We are longing for our circumstances to end so things can go back to normal. What the New Testament wants us to desire is not for things to be back to normal down here; the New Testament wants us to long for the end of all things down here so that the next life with God begins. That is why he says be patient until the coming of the Lord and he gives the farmer as the example. There is an end in sight and we are going to see Jesus.

Look at the next verse, "You also, be patient." Be patient as the farmer is. Then he says something. What does your Bible say? It has something to do with heart. Does your Bible say, "Establish your hearts..."? Does your Bible say, "Strengthen your hearts..."? Now, the last time James talked about heart it was in verse 5 of chapter 5. He talked about the rich who are living life for here and here only, and they are getting fat for the day of slaughter. It is the picture of the hog or the calf that we are fattening out. That is what life does to an unbeliever who is seeking everything he can grab in this life. He is fattening his heart for the day of slaughter. He is being unjust. He is being unethical. But what does James tell us who are

believers, to us who are brothers, to do? He says be patient and strengthen your heart. He doesn't say change your circumstances; he says strengthen your heart. How are you doing? Do you understand that if we put chapter 5 with chapter 1 this is what trials, tribulation, and unfavorable circumstances are all about in our life? It gives us the opportunity to strengthen who we are because ultimately we know that what God is bringing into our life is to strengthen us so that we can react just like Christ would react in the situation that we are in. This is why we must have the ability to suffer long with people.

Then, James tells us again, "...for the coming of the Lord is at hand." Now, I want us to stop and have an honest talk. How could James say the coming of the Lord is at hand when the Lord didn't come in those people's lifetime, and now it has been almost 2,000 years? When the book of Revelation ends in the 22nd chapter, Jesus says three times, "Behold, I am coming soon." It has been 2,000 years, and still He hasn't come. I think because it has been 2,000 years and I have only experienced 60 of those 2,000 years, you have experienced however many years you have experienced, we don't believe that His coming is at hand. Agreed? Intellectually we know, yes, but practically, no. We can't change this. When the New Testament talks about Jesus coming soon and the coming of the Lord being at hand, what it is talking about is the coming of the Lord is imminent. It could happen at any moment and you better be ready. Even Jesus said He didn't know the hour or the day. If He didn't know the hour or day, you and I don't know the hour or the day. But in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Jesus kind of gave us a hint. After talking about His second coming, He told a parable about a man who gave talents to his servants and then we went on a long journey. There is a sense in which Jesus warned us it could be a little while...but then it could be this afternoon. The question is are we ready?

Now, I don't want you to let anyone cause you to doubt that Christ is coming back. He is coming back and He could come back at any time, but we need to balance what James says with what Peter said. When James says that the coming of the Lord is at hand, he is meaning it is imminent, it

could happen at any time, but if it doesn't happen today, Peter tells why it didn't happen today. He told us that God's time and our time are different, and he quoted from the Old Testament about how with God a thousand years is as a day and a day is as a thousand years. So please understand that what has been 2,000 years for us may have just been two days with God. God sees time differently than we see time. He is outside and inside of time at the same time, so don't let 2,000 years make you believe that He couldn't come back at any time today. The question is are you ready?

Now, in the context here, being ready is not referring to being saved. The context for us as a church is, are we going to be patient today or will we be impatient? When we are impatient, we aren't ready for the coming of the Lord. Does that make sense? Because when you are impatient, you do things you shouldn't do. When you are impatient, you sometimes don't wait, and when you don't wait, you sometimes mess things up.

Now, you knew James was going to do this...he is going to stick something in here about the tongue again. He tells us, "Do not grumble against one another, brothers [then he tells us why we shouldn't grumble] so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door." Here is what I want you to see — I want you to see that James is tying the coming of the Lord, imminently, at any time, with Him also coming as the Judge when He comes. And how close is He? He is standing at the door.

Now, can I ask you a question? Are there some things that you wouldn't do inside the room if somebody else were outside the door? Yes! Does everyone agree? As a matter of fact, sometimes there are things we do in a room that make us lock the door to make sure that if there is someone at the door they can't come through the door into the room. There are just some things that we don't do if we know somebody is at the door because if they are at the door and the walls are thin, even if they can't get in the room, they might hear what we were saying inside of the room. You have all done this. Before you get ready to say something, you have all looked around to make sure no one was listening or close by before we say what we are going to say, right? How many times have you answered the phone

and say, "Excuse me," and you go outside of the room because you don't want anybody else to hear your phone conversation. We all do that!

James says don't grumble against one another, brothers, for the Judge is standing at the door! How does James always tie the tongue into everything! Because the tongue reveals the heart. Have any of you grumbled during the virus? He says when it comes to family, we don't grumble, we don't murmur. The Greek word here literally means to sigh. Have you ever done that? A sigh is a sign of impatience, and you aren't suffering with that person. Now that you just sighed, there is a really good chance that if someone is really close by you are going to tell them why you just sighed about that other person. We have all done it, amen? We wouldn't do it if we thought the Judge standing by the door.

Do you remember when Jesus talked about not forgiving? He basically told us we need to forgive because if we don't, *our* sins won't be forgiven. Jesus is basically saying here that if you don't want God to judge you, then you quit judging other people, especially your brothers and sisters in Christ. This is hard...and it is why He reminds us twice why we don't do this...we don't do this because we know Christ could come at any moment. Yes, He is coming for us in salvation, but yet even those of us who are saved will stand before the judgement seat of Christ. Even though we will not be judged according to our sin, we will not be separated from God because of sin, we will give an account of how we lived our life as a Christian. Behind the double doors of judgment is Christ. He is that close to you and I standing before Him. What is coming out of your mouth and my mouth is revealing our hearts! It's not just how much we come to church, not just how much we study, not just how much money we give to the church, and not how many mission trips we go on, but James says if you really want to see your heart, take just a moment and listen to what is coming out of our mouth.

Now, James is going to give us an example again in verses 10–11. Because the church is primarily Jewish here, they were schooled in the Old Testament Scriptures. By the time they were thirteen, many of those young

men had memorized much of the Old Testament. They were sons of the commandment who had been converted to Christ. They no longer believe in a blood sacrifice of an animal, but they believe in the shed blood of Christ for their salvation. But now, because they are living in a situation where they are being oppressed by oppressors, they are the 'have nots,' James reminds them of those great men they have read about in the Old Testament called the prophets, and how we call each one of those men blessed who were steadfast in the suffering they went through. They were patient in their suffering and they remained steadfast.

I don't know where we got this thought, this teaching that Christians don't suffer. As a matter of fact, everybody we read and admire in the Old Testament suffered and they came through it, and it made them stronger and better. Yet we want to complain and belly ache. Yet we want to quit and run away from instead of staying in and under? Do you remember Jeremiah? Because of his faithfulness to God, the men in his own town tried to take his life. I wonder what I would think if the people of Dexter wanted to kill me and trying to kill me. Do you remember Ezekiel? He lost his wife and God said don't cry, don't mourn. And he was a witness to the nation of Israel during the death of his spouse...and we think we have it bad! Hosea? His wife became a harlot! He had to go buy her back out of the slave market to be a picture to Israel of how Israel had sinned against God. We love the book of Daniel and we love to speculate about the future. I dare say we would have never known there was a Daniel had there not been a deportation and him be taken from his homeland and deported to another place. What would we do in America if that happened to us? Yet Daniel stayed faithful to the point that he got thrown into a lion's den. And we love teaching that story to our kids, yet we want to complain, belly ache, grumble, and murmur when something like that happens to us.

I just want to be honest with you, and I know I am not alone in this; I struggle a little bit with James's next illustration because his next illustration is Job. But praise the Lord he switches the word patient to steadfast. It is not the Greek word, *Makrothumia*; it is the Greek word, *hupomone*. It is the word picture of the weightlifter who lifts the weight

and he has to stand under the weight. When he stands under the weight, it is considered a lift. It literally means to be under and to remain. Therefore, we translate it as steadfast. God is letting the church know there will be times when we will be oppressed and we are supposed to still be patient, not waiting for the oppression to end but waiting for the coming of the Lord because He is ultimately the Judge, not us. We don't take matters into our own hands and start judging; that is His business.

And so James gives an example of the Old Testament prophets, in particular, Job and his steadfastness. If you remember that story, it starts out by God asking Satan, have you checked out my servant, Job? God talks about how he is a righteous man, and Satan believes the only reason he is righteous is because God has blessed him. You know the story. Have you read the book of Job lately? Can I say Job didn't take it lying down? He might have been ok if his three friends hadn't shown up, but when his friends showed up and started in, you just start seeing some things come out of him... right? Ultimately, when you get to the end of the book, this righteous man repents. I love the 42nd chapter in verse 5 where Job says I had heard about you with my ears, but I have now seen you with my eyes. Whoa! Did you hear this? What Job is saying is I had heard what others said about you and I fell in love with you, and I loved you and I have been following you — but now after losing everything in my life except my wife and you, I no longer know you because of what *others* have said or wrote about you, I know you for who you are! I know you intimately, I know you personally!

Are you getting this? This is why James wants us to be patient and wait, and let the Lord ultimately settle things. This is why he wants us to be steadfast — because in us being steadfast there is an intimacy that we will come to know — we will come to know Him as He really is...merciful and compassionate. Wow! As a church, we don't just want to know *about* Him, we want to *know* Him! This is why we have to be patient. This is why we suffer with one another. When we get in that circumstance, we don't run away from it, we don't run out from under it, we remain in it. And as we remain in it, God is building us into the person of Christ.

Then, James does it again. He goes back to the tongue and he says quit swearing, "But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by Heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation." I have to be honest with you; I have struggled with the book of James. The reason I have struggled with the book of James is because a lot of people had led me to believe that James was kind of written after the proverbs, just a lot of isolated thoughts just jumbled together, like the book of Proverbs is. I don't believe that. There is a cohesiveness about this letter. Yes, there is a lot of wisdom in it, but here is what James is ultimately teaching us — the trials and tribulations of life ultimately reveal where our heart really is and who we really are. And ultimately, the way you see that, give evidence of that, is what comes out of your mouth.

Now, that passage might seem strange to us, so let's look back at Matthew chapter 23. Jesus is speaking about how the Pharisees said they could make an oath and if they swore by the temple, they didn't have to keep their word. But if they swore by the gold of the temple, they had to keep their word. Do you remember that? Now, I remember when I was a kid we would say that we were going to do something and the person we were with didn't really believe we were going to do it, so they would make us swear — we would have to cross our hearts. Do you remember what you had to say when you crossed your heart? You said "Cross my heart, hope to die, stick a finger in my eye." What you were saying there was if you didn't keep your word you hoped you died. That is serious, amen? Now, if you didn't keep your word and you didn't die, the other person got to stick their finger in your eye. Now, there would be a lot of people who would swear, but here is what all of us knew — if you crossed your heart but had your fingers crossed while you were saying "hope to die," the crossing of the fingers nullified the crossing of the heart, so you didn't have to keep your word. So if you were talking to one of those people you didn't trust, you wanted to see both hands! You wanted them to take their socks and shoes off so that there were no toes crossed either so they couldn't back out of what they said!

Here is what James is saying...your life is being patterned after the eternal Word of God. He is coming. His coming is imminent. He is at the doors! When you speak, your word, just a simple yes or no, really reveals who you are. It should be an insult to you and I if we tell somebody something and then they say, "Do you promise?" "Do you swear?" I don't think we really realize how many times we say things to people that gives them hope and expectation and we never even think about what we are saying, so they come back and say, "Do you promise?" Be patient. Strengthen your heart. Be steadfast. Don't grumble about people. Don't swear — just yes or no.