

## **James: Be Patient**

**James 5:7-12**

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If you have your bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to James Chapter 5 verse 7.

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

Amen, this is God's Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

"O Lord we ask that You would help us not only to understand Your word, but to believe Your word. And then to do Your word, being transformed by the Spirit that the law might be written on our hearts. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen."

James is concerned to set before us as Christians in this passage, the need for patience. And you will have noticed how many times he says *brethren* in this passage. He is talking to believers. He's talking to believers who are enduring trials, and he is concerned to set before us as Christians the proper attitude and frame of mind that we must have if we are going to be able to persevere to the end. He is concerned that we have the right point of focus in our lives, if we are going to be able to respond to the trails of life in an appropriate and Christian way.

James knows that the Christian life is a long journey and that growth in the Christian life is a process. It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen in a

single point of struggle and lead to a life of unchallenged bliss, and thereafter it is unchallenged in growth. But in order to benefit from the process of growth and to prosper and to be able to rejoice in the times of trial, we have to have the proper focal point for our lives. And he's concerned to share that with us in this passage. He's also concerned to show us things which will serve as symptoms that we are not demonstrating the kind of patience and endurance necessary for the Christian life.

## **I. Believers persevere under trial waiting the return of the Lord.**

I'd like to look at two or three things that he teaches in this passage. First in verses 7 and 8, James calls us to live waiting patiently for the coming of Christ, even under duress. He's calling on us as Christians to be prepared to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord, even in the midst of trials. Listen to what he says: "Therefore, be patient brethren until the coming of the Lord." James will teach in this whole section that the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint, and the finish line is the second coming and not anything less. The Christian life is a marathon not a sprint. The finish line is the second coming. Not even death, nothing less than the second coming serves as the finish line, the goal, the focal point that the Christian is looking to.

In verse 7, James delivers the first of six imperatives in this passage. Four of them are positive, two of them are negative. I've already said there are six imperatives. You're curious, so let me show you.

In verse 7 be patient. In verse 8 be 'patient.' The second time he's given an imperative. It's the same one, but he gives it again. The third one, 'strengthen your hearts.' Then look to verse 9, 'do not complain against one another,' there's the first negative directive that he gives. Verse 12 second negative directive, 'do not swear.' And then the second half of that verse 'but, let your yes be yes, and your no, no.' So there are the six directives that James gives in this passage.

But, here in verse 7, he begins with be patient. Now this is not a rebuke against impatient husbands. It is not a rebuke against impatient wives. It is not a rebuke against impatient moms and dads. There may need to rebuke impatient husbands, or wives or parents, or rebuke people who don't like to stand in lines. But this is not talking about that kind of impatient. My father-in-law doesn't stand in lines. If we show up at the Piccadilly and the lines are too long. He'll say this, and we know the speech is coming "I stood in all the lines I'm ever going to stand in Army and I'm not standing in lines anymore." We know it's coming, the speech is coming. If that line is more that 3 or 4 people deep, we're heading somewhere else. It's the S & S Cafeteria or the Western Sizzling, but it's not the Piccadilly that night, because we are not going to stand in lines. This is not the kind of impatience; however, that James is getting at here. Though it may be related, we may want to address that, and it may be a good thing to work on, but that is not

the kind of impatience that James is talking about.

James is talking about a bigger picture. He is talking about living a life that is looking forward to one event. And that event is not the achievement of our success. That's not something we've been looking to, financial independence, vocational success and recognition, civic success and recognition, being elected to an office that we've always aspired being elected to. It's not retirement, "I've always wanted to get to the point where I could retire and enjoy the grand things and travel the world." It's not even death. It's not even the Christian desiring to cross the finish line of death and have one's soul ushered immediately into the presence of God while your body rests in the ground, united to Christ, until the day of the resurrection. No, the day that the Christian is looking forward to, is the day of the coming of Christ. And James is saying that we need to live life in light of that focal point. It is the coming of Christ for which we are all waiting. All life is to be lived in light of that event.

Did you know that the coming of Christ is mentioned some three hundred times in the New Testament. There is a mention of the coming of Christ one time for every thirteen verses from Matthew to Revelation. Think God has a point in that? James is drawing that out and he's saying "that is the goal for which we are aiming. That is the focal point of life." James is saying that we need to cultivate a mind-set for the long haul and we need to patiently wait for that great event, the coming of Christ. The Christian life is then, as one author has called it, "A long obedience in the same direction." The direction, the goal, the purpose, the aim is the coming of Christ to get there. And we are to be faithful and patient to arrive.

And notice here James is going right back to the beginning of the book and he's taking up that subject of the Christian endurance. He knew these Christians were going to be facing trials. They were already in the midst of trials. And so he's encouraging them to endure. He's right back on that theme again in this passage. James gives a very mundane illustration of this point, and he goes to the farmer. Now, any of you who are farmers or have farmed, you will appreciate the poignancy of the illustration. He speaks of the *early* and the *later* rains. Now, in Palestine the early rains softened up the grounds so that you could plant, and the later rains made the harvest fruitful and the farmer was totally dependant upon the yield that he would get from the Lord providing those rains. All he could do was do his part and wait for the Lord to bring those rains, at the right time, in the right amount, at the right place.

James says just like that, just like the farmer waits on the appropriate weather for planting and harvesting and is totally dependent; no matter how he works on those events, so also we must patiently endure by cultivating a fixed heart. Notice what he says in verse 8, "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts." He's calling on us to fix our hearts. He's pointing to a determination a resolution, a perseverance, a persistence in striving for the gold, a stickability. He uses the same verb that is found in Luke 9:51. Remember that passage, turn with me

there. In Luke 9:51 Luke is telling you about Jesus and about His preparation for His coming crucifixion and death, and he says in Luke 9:51 that “Jesus set his face resolutely to go to Jerusalem.” That’s the same word that James is using here, that you are to set your heart resolutely, that you are to strengthen your heart. You’re to fix your eye on the goal of the coming of Christ, just like Jesus fixed his eye on His work of the cross and death and burial and resurrection at Jerusalem, and you are to continue to go that long obedience in the same direction.

James’ point is that the whole of life is to be lived in light of the Lord’s coming and in patient resolved preparation for that day. James knows that you don’t drift into holiness. You may drift into sin, but nobody has every yet drifted into holiness. You don’t accidentally stumble into holiness. Holiness is grown into, but it needs to be cultivated by patience and by the purpose of God. And so in this passage he is orienting us to be prepared for the long haul, to be prepared for trials, and to be aiming for the coming of the Lord.

You see James doctrine of the Christian life is the doctrine of process and growth. James knows that we don’t become like Jesus over night. James knows that there is not a definitive experience that we can have over the span of 15 or 20 minutes that will then reorient us so that we never ever have another struggle in the rest of life. No our life is a process of growth in holiness and patience endurance, determination to persevere is a central ingredient to it. Because, we don’t drift into holiness or stumble into holiness we grow into holiness. And that needs to be cultivated. And it can be only done if we have the proper focus the coming of Christ.

And that’s why you have these glorious military metaphors of the Christian life in the Scriptures. Paul will speak about *fighting the faith*. It’s an appropriate metaphor to draw on. And we can even learn things about this from the illustrations of military history. Some of you are military historians. Some of you like the Duke of Wellington, who fought the campaigns for Britain against Napoleon, during the Napoleonic Wars in the early 19th century. And I love, for one, his Peninsular Campaigns. But of course the greatest battle of Wellington’s that I love to study is the battle of Waterloo. And you may or may not know it, but that great victory, his most famous victory, was a victory in which his battle plan was basically this: “Get pounded all day and wait for the Prussians.” That was the battle plan of Waterloo. Wellington had an army that was inexperienced with only a few veterans. He did not dare attack Napoleon, one of the greatest strategic generals in the history of Western warfare. And so he determined that his army needed to stand there and wait until the Prussians got there, and hold on until the Prussians could then mount an offensive attack against Napoleon. And that’s what he told his adjutants, we are going to stand on this hill and hold the line, and no matter what happens all day, our only goal is this: wait until Blucher and the Prussians get here and then they will attack Napoleon’s flank. And that’s exactly what he did at Waterloo. He got pounded all day as he waited for the Prussians

to get there. And they got there and they won. It was the only battle in the history of military warfare in the 19th century that was lost at 5 o'clock and won at 7 o'clock by the same side. The battle was over. Napoleon had won at 5 o'clock. But, that was when the Prussians arrived. And by 7 o'clock it was a rout. The plan worked. But, here was the plan: Get pounded all day and wait for the Prussians. In other words, there was a point which the armies of Wellington had to focus on, and that point was the arrival of the Prussians. If they didn't arrive, game over. But, when they arrived, victory was at hand.

And so the Christian life is in the same way. Do you remember Washington's strategy during the American Revolutionary War? Keep the army alive. That was his strategy. The idea was this: As long as there is a continental army, there is a revolution. As long as the British don't wipe out the Continental Army, the revolution continues. Therefore, I'm going to march this Army around, it doesn't matter whether we fight, it doesn't matter whether we win, we just have to be. As long as we're alive, and we can wait for the British to tire out, there's a possibility of winning this war, and winning our freedom. So there was a focal point. But, the goal required patience endurance and so also does Christian life.

So many of our hymns celebrate this aspect of the Christian life, and none is clearer, none is more illustrative of what James is talking about here than number 358. Now turn with me there if you would. You know it. We sing it at funerals all the time. It is one of my favorite hymns, written by Ralph Vaughan Williams. It's called "For all the Saints." Now, what you may not know, I think we have what, 5 or 6 stanzas in the hymnal, though Williams actually wrote something like twelve stanzas. Now, don't get nervous we're not going to sing all twelve today. But I am going to quote from some of the stanzas that are not in the hymnal, as well as some that are.

You see the premise of this hymn. It is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the way He caused the people of God to persevere to the very end. He praises God for all the saints who have found their labors rest, those saints who are above, enjoying the presence of God right now. And in some of the verses that you don't have, he praises God for the martyrs, for the prophets, for the evangelists, who have gone before and are now in heaven above. God was the One who caused them to persevere. God is the One who brought them to the throne above. And listen to what He says about them, "Thou wast their rock, their fortress, and their might, Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well fought fight; Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light." And so he sings of this glorious reality that God was their one hope during dark days.

Then he turns the focus of prayer upon us. And he begins to pray that God would make us to be faithful in the fight that we're fighting. Listen to what he says. "O may Thy soldiers faithful, true, and bold, fight as the saints who nobly fought of old, and win with them the victor's crown of gold." And so he's praying that God would enable us to fight as the saints who have gone before us. And this is what

he says in the next stanza. "And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song, and hearts are brave again and arms are strong." You see what he's saying. When you're beginning to fail, you hear in the distant future the triumph song, because the victory is already won in Christ. And what you need is to get a glimpse of that victory that is already won, that is certain, it is more certain than the pew that you are sitting in or the air that you are breathing right now. And you need to get a sight of it, a sound of it, a smell of it and then you can go on. Then you can put one foot in front of the other and survive the trials that you're going through now.

But, he's still not done. He goes on. "The golden evening brightens in the west; soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest; sweet is the calm of paradise the blest." This is one reason we sing this glorious hymn at funerals. He's talking about the day when the sunset of God sets upon a believer. And that believer's body is laid in the grave and his soul goes to be in paradise the blessed. But, even that is not the focal point of the ultimate hope.

There are two more stanzas in the song. It's not just a faithful death that the believer is aiming for. There's something more. Listen to what Williams says. "But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day; the saints triumphant rise in bright array; the King of glory passes on His way. Alleluia! Alleluia! From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast, through gates of pearl streams in the countless host, singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia! Alleluia!" That's the point. That's what we're working for. There are points in my life when I'm discouraged in ministry, when I'm discouraged with my own sin, when I wonder why I'm doing this. That I remind myself that there will be a day when I stand with the elders and with my fellow ministers and we will see the king of glory passing on His way. And we will turn to one another and we will say, "This is why we did it. This is why we preached. This is why we prayed. This is why we worked. This is what we were hoping for." We were hoping for the day when we would see the coming King of glory passing on His way and we can endure anything if that is our hope. And that's what James is saying. James is saying you've got to fix your eyes on the coming of Christ. And then in the midst of the trials that God will surely bring your way, you will be able to endure.

## **II. Evidence of struggle with patience**

Now, in verses 9 through 12 he talks about two symptoms that show that we're actually struggling with this kind of patience and endurance. In verses 9 through 11, he speaks about complaining and criticizing, recriminating against our brothers and sisters. And he says, do not complain, do not recriminate against, do not criticize, do not blame the brethren in the midst of your trials. You see, we're not showing the kind of Christian patience that he's calling for in verses 7 and 8 if we're grumbling against the brethren.

It's not surprising that one grand temptation and trial is to pick on others. You know, you're going through a hard time and it's easy to look for somebody else to blame. And so often the people that we target are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we blame them somehow and we point out their deficiencies, and they didn't minister to us the way we wanted them to minister to us in the midst of this trial, and they didn't do this, and they didn't do that. And suddenly there's a division being fermented by our words. And James says, don't do it. Because, again Christ is coming, He's the judge right at the door. Don't let the judge walk through the door, right where that critical word is coming out from you mouth against a brother and sister in Christ. You know how it is, you're just about to say it and right around the corner there they are. And you're pulling that word back in. And he's saying, don't do that, don't let the Lord walk in the door while you are criticizing your brethren.

And instead of destructive speech which disrupts the fellowship of God, he says, verses 10 and 11, consider the prophets in Job. They endured suffering and with their speech, what did they do? They edified the brethren. And we learn three things from them. Look at verse 10. We learn that we ought to expect to experience suffering which requires patience.

“As an example, brethren of suffering and patience, take the prophets.” James is saying this is the norm for the Christian life. We ought to expect these kinds of trials which demand endurance, which demand patience. Think of it friends, if Daniel had not been exiled and deported, we would have never heard of him. If Daniel had not been thrown into a lion's den, we'd never heard of him. If Daniel had not been challenged to become worldly and compromise himself in the Babylonian court, we never would have heard of him. But, because he went through those trials which required endurance he encouraged us. Which of us has not been encouraged by his words?

Secondly, James says there is blessing and happiness in the exercise of patience and endurance. Look at what he says again. “We count those blessed who endured.” God blesses those who patiently endure. We look at Daniel and we look at his heart in the midst of heartbreak and we say, “Lord I wish I could be like that.” We look at brothers and sisters in this church going through trials that we can't comprehend, and we see them doing it nobly and with faith and sometimes to ourselves we mumble up a prayer, “Lord I wish I could be like that.” Why, because there's blessing in enduring during trial. We see the character that it produces. Weren't we singing about it? “Sanctify to thee thy deepest distress, the flame shall not hurt thee I only design, thy dross to consume thy gold to refine”. We long to have the character that is produced, the blessing which results from trials and endurance.

Thirdly, there is a purpose in trials that demand endurance and patience. Look at what he says in verse 11. We have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen that outcome of the Lord's dealings. You remember the end of the book. Job 42,

“Lord I had heard of Thee, but now I have seen Thee with my own eyes.” God had revealed Himself in an extraordinary way. Notice there that the outcome of this endurance is not simply character building, but it is a sight of the living God in His mercy and compassion. You see, Job just didn't come through the experience with more character, with refined character, with girded character, he came through his experience with more experience of the living God. He knew God in a way, at the end of that experience, that he did not know Him at the beginning. James is saying, look at the prophets, look at Job, and you learn this about trials. And, so instead of criticizing the brethren and complaining, and instead of recriminations against the brethren in the midst of your trials, remember the prophets in Job. And realize that even trials God intends for blessings for his people.

And then finally this, you may be scratching your head and saying, “Verse 12, I just don't get it. What do *oaths* have to do with trials and patience and endurance and suffering? Why in the world would James suddenly say, ‘Above all brethren, don't swear? Don't swear by heaven or by earth. What does that have to do with anything?’” Well, you know that in James' and Jesus' day there was a tendency to use oaths to get around a commitment rather than to reinforce it. And James, just like Jesus, is attacking that kind of usage of oaths. But, that still doesn't answer the question. Why in the world would James bring this up?

James is talking about living the Christian life with a focal point on the coming of the Lord. What does oath taking and prevaricating speech have to do with this? Well let me ask you this, do you think it is possible that James could have had in mind oaths that Peter once took about how faithful he was going to be to God, about how faithful he was going to be to Christ. “Lord if everybody leaves You. I will not leave You. Lord, if I have to die to save You, I'll die in Your place.” And then do you think James could have had in his mind some other oaths which Peter took on the night of Jesus trial and crucifixion, oaths which I can't utter here in polite company, in which he said, “I don't even know the man,” the same man who he had sworn to follow to the death a few hours before. You see James is saying that in the Christian life, patience is not manifested by grand verbal promises, but by quiet talk that follows through. Our patient endurance will be shown, not in the grandiosity of our verbal commitments, but in our endurance under trial.

Now some of you are enduring ongoing trials this day. And some of you on a regular basis wake up in the morning and have to face the challenge of putting one foot in front of the other and just going on. And I can't imagine a more comforting and challenging and strengthening and applicable word than the word that James is speaking to you today under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that you my brethren are to be patient and wait until the coming of the Lord. Let's pray.



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