

August 26, 2007

James 5:7-11

Alright good morning. Grab your Bibles and let's go back to the book of James. We started the last chapter of our study last week. This morning we'll continue in chapter 5 with verses 7-11 where James is in a way expanding on what he started back in chapter 1 on how to handle trials.

Life on this planet can be hard – and a lot of times things happen that just don't seem to make sense to us – things that are hard to understand. And just being a Christian doesn't make you immune to that kind of struggle. When God saves you, He doesn't put you in some kind of magic bubble that protects you from trials or pain. In fact the Bible not only says that you might suffer, it says that we will suffer if we are righteous, particularly at the hands of other people.

And that too can be hard to understand. When you're confronted with the reality that when you do what is right, you often are called on to suffer, that's even harder to understand. And what can be more confusing is when you are doing right, you are suffering because of it, and you look around and see the wicked flourishing.

And that's exactly what's happening here in James. He's writing to Jewish Christians who have been scattered across the nations because of their faith. They were poor. They were refugees. They were seeking God and following Him and they were struggling and at the same time they saw ungodly, wicked unbelievers living luxuriously around them.

Those are the times you'd feel like giving up. And James knows that and that's what the first 11 verses of this chapter are all about. Let's look at verses 7-11.

James 5:7-11

7 *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.*

8 *You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

9 *Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!*

10 *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

11 *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.*

James wants to answer the questions that he knows is on their minds and that often are on ours. How are we to respond when life seems unfair? ***How are we to respond when the righteous suffer and the wicked seem to flourish? Or even more specifically – how do we respond when we are oppressed for righteousness' sake?***

James' answer is easy to say, incredibly hard to obey. I acknowledge that today. He says, "**Be PATIENT!**"

That's the main theme here. In v 7, be patient. In v 8, as the farmer is patient, you be patient. In v 10, as an example of patience, take the prophets. In v 11 he uses the word endure which is basically a synonym for patience.

So what does that mean? How are we supposed to respond that fulfills this command to be patient?

First it means you **respond with an attitude of self-RESTRAINT. You refuse to RETALIATE.** That's what this word means. Back in chapter 1, James talked about endurance and how we are to respond to trials. This word is different and focuses on how we are to respond to people. It literally is made up of two Greek words – one that means long and one that means temper. Long tempered. Which is the opposite of what? Short tempered. Patience here is being slow to become angry with other people.

When the world says rebel – get vengeance – get even – demand your rights – James is saying no, be patient. Be willing to suffer. Even for a long time.

Now this is one of those times when we kind of want to just close our Bibles real quiet like and move on and hope nobody noticed. Who wants to hear that? Be willing to suffer, even for a long time.

But if we ignore what James says here, we have to pretty much ignore much of the Bible because this idea is not just unique to James. It is everywhere. All over the place, Scripture makes it clear that we as believers should respond to persecution and suffering totally different than an unbeliever. In fact – just look at Jesus. Paul told us in Philippians we are to have the same attitude as Christ. And Peter explains what that attitude is. Look at it with me – **1 Peter 2.**

21 *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

22 *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*

23 *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.*

That's a pretty significant deal. That's the very opposite of what this world and often times our nature tells us to do. Be patient.

James is not talking about being a wimp or a dish-towel or a door mat. Scripture makes it clear that God has given us government for a reason and its not wrong to use legitimate means like the police to protect you and your family. God hates injustice – we saw that last week – and you can find men of God all through history standing up against it.

But what James is talking about here is a **purposeful decision not to be controlled by self-INTEREST.** Instead, to care most about the glory of God. So when the pursuit of self-interest conflicts with the pursuit of the glory of God, we willingly lay aside our pursuit of self that Christ may be glorified.

Second – if we are going to be patient, we must **refuse to become BITTER or to develop a RESENTFUL spirit.** This is where it gets difficult.

In verse 9 he writes: Do not grumble against each other, brothers. That verse seems out of place when everything else is about patience until you stop and realize that **COMPLAINING at others is one of the first signs that we are becoming impatient.**

When things aren't going your way, it's easy to get frustrated and as a result, develop a bitter kind of spirit. That's this word grumble or complain – it means to groan or sigh – not even so much saying anything as having an inner feeling of dissatisfaction and resentment.

You see what happens is we're treated unfairly – we can't do anything about it – so become impatient and frustrated and start taking it out on each other. We become like the ones who are persecuting us in that we are attacking the innocent.

And James says you've got to be aware of that – if you're going to be patient when persecuted or when life seems unfair, you've got to refuse to retaliate against those who mistreat you and you must refuse to develop a bitter spirit against those who are close to you.

Thirdly – and positively – James says in v10 as an example, look to the prophets of God. What does that mean?

He's saying look – it's never been easy to do God's will. Remember the prophets – the guys who were literally speaking God's words and yet none of them had an easy life. One pastor sums it up like this:

Think Noah. He obeyed God and he spent much of his life being mocked and ridiculed by all of those around him. Think about Moses. He obeyed God and what happened? His own people turned on him. His own family turned on him. Think about David. He obeyed God and he was pursued and hunted down by Saul. Think about Elijah. He obeyed God and he ends up in the desert wanting to die. Think about Jeremiah he obeyed God and ended up in a pit.

Yet in spite of all that, in spite of all their difficulties, they obeyed God. Noah kept building the ark, Moses kept leading God's people, David kept praising and worshiping God, Elijah kept speaking God's Words, and Jeremiah refused to complain. They obeyed God and because they obeyed God their life was very, very hard. And you know what, they had their struggles. We read of times when they were like why God, why is this happening. Yet they kept pressing on, doing what was right, no matter the consequences. We've got to **keep pressing on, doing what is RIGHT, no matter the consequences.**

The active command in this passage for you and me today – is be patient. But James knows it isn't going to be easy. So not only does he tell us how to respond – he tells us why. Why should we respond that way?

First – James says you should be patient **because you know JESUS IS COMING BACK.** In other words, this life is not all there is, so plan to be in it for the long haul. Look at the end of verse 7. "Be patient therefore brothers until the Lord's coming." Verse 8, "the Lord's coming is near." Verse 9, "The Judge is standing right at the door."

Listen - this is so important - this is where it all begins to make sense - James is saying - God doesn't call us to endure suffering forever. The believer chooses to be patient, to endure suffering, he refuses to lash out, because he knows there is an end. James says be patient until the coming of the Lord. Point being, after that, you don't need to be patient anymore. We're patient with difficult circumstances and difficult people now because we're looking forward to something better in the future. **It won't ALWAYS be this way.**

We're a people whose lives are literally controlled by that hope. We know that the Lord's return is a fact, and we know that the Lord's return could be anytime, and we know that when Jesus returns he's coming as Judge, and that changes everything about the way we live and the decisions we make.

Max Lucado writes that in the midst of the types of hardships we've been talking about, the world says – "Life is short – get out." But God's wisdom says, "Life is short – stay in."

The BREVITY of life grants power to abide, not an excuse to bail.

Will your problems pass? No guarantee they will. Will your pain cease? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But here's the promise from 2 Corinthians 4:17

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

And in case you are thinking – but Paul doesn't understand what I'm going through. My stuff isn't light and momentary. Let me remind you what Paul is talking about – all you have to do is turn a few pages to the right to chapter 11:24-28

24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

26 *I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.*

27 *I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

28 *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

The brevity of life is not an excuse to bail, it is a reason to endure. We Christians are not masochists – we don't enjoy pain. But we recognize there is something much worse than any suffering in this world and that is called Hell. And we realize there is something better than any pleasure in this world. And this called heaven and being with Christ. And so we make a choice. We say yes, I'll endure this suffering now because I'm waiting.

The second answer that James gives us to the why we respond with patience is **because you know that GOD HAS A PURPOSE**. Just like the farmer in verse 7 knows that the purpose of the waiting and the early rains and the late rains is to produce a valuable crop – we know that not only do certain things take time and now is not all there is, but that God is working to bring about his glory – God has a purpose.

In verse 11 James talks about Job and his perseverance and what the Lord finally brought about.

Job was a godly man. Satan came to God and said, "I don't think You have one man on the earth that will be true to You." He said, "Yes I do, Job." And He said, "Satan, you can't kill him but you can do just about everything else you want to him and I'll prove that he's a faithful man. I'll show you that I can have a man who is totally committed to Me."

Satan went after Job. Destroyed him in every way possible. Took away his family. Killed his children. Took away all his crops, his land, his possessions, everything he owned, gave him serious, severe disease. And in it all, Job never wavered. He endured. He complained now and then, but mostly about his dumb friends who were giving him stupid answers as to what was going on. His wife tried to get him to curse God and die, and he refused to do it. And he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." He said, "The Lord gave, the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." He cried out to God in confusion. He listened to his friends give him all the wrong reports as to why it was happening. But he endured and he endured and he did no sin with his mouth, it says.

Why? Job trusted that God had a purpose. And at the end, what did he say in Job 42:5 "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."

What did he mean by that? Now I know who You are, God. I never saw You in my good times as clearly as I saw You in my bad times. I see that. I see who You are.

What was God's purpose with Job? One, to test his faith and prove it real. Two, to strengthen his faith so that he would see God more clearly. Three, to prove to Satan that there was a man totally a lover of God no matter what it cost. And fourthly, to increase Job's blessedness because the book ends with Job being blessed. God chose to give him twice as much as he had before.

Max Lucado says "Your pain has a purpose. Your problems, struggles, heartaches, and hassles cooperate toward one end – the glory of God. The New Living Translation of **Psalms 50:15** says "Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you and you will give me glory."

Can we handle that? Can you handle the fact that when you go through a trial God has a greater thing in mind – a purpose for his glory in and through you? That's why we respond with patience.

And lastly – just real quick – the last line says “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” Why does that matter? Because patience comes when we understand the Lord’s character. The third reason we respond with patience is **because you know the LORD’S CHARACTER**. Whatever you are going through, he is full of compassion. That phrase is really unique –in fact this is the first time it appears anywhere – not just in the Bible – but anywhere and after James uses it, it is picked up by some other non-biblical writes. But without going into all the etymology the thought behind it is that when we really feel for someone, we physically feel it in our gut. Our stomach will hurt, our chest will ache when we really care about someone else’s pain. James is saying that is true of God towards us. That God not only is coming back so that things won’t always be this way – God not only has a purpose even in the midst of the difficulties – but that God feels deeply his love for you when you are in the midst of those hard times.

He’s saying you can be patient because you are never alone. God’s mercy is new every morning and his overwhelming love for you is why he says cast your cares on Him for he cares for you.

This is a perspective that we’ve got to start to understand this morning. Because times will come when you will suffer for doing what is right. Times will come when the fallenness of this world will have consequences that bring pain into your life. Times will come when fair isn’t fair. And when you follow the suffering and troubles in this world to their source – to their headwaters so to speak – you will not find panic stricken God – you will not find an angry God – you will not find an absentee God – but you will find a sovereign God.

A God who is coming again. A God who carries out his plans moment by moment. A God who is so in love with you that he will never let you face what you cannot endure by his grace.

So we are patient. We don’t retaliate in hate. We don’t strike out in bitterness. We press on in obedience. And we are patient for the glory of God.

This too is a test of the authenticity of our faith. In the context of the overall book of James – he is saying that if when the going gets tough, you give up on your faith – you decide God’s way isn’t worth it – then your faith wasn’t real in the first place. But **when you rely on Him for the PATIENCE to endure even when you don’t understand, your faith is real – your faith is STRENGTHENED – and God is GLORIFIED in you.**

Let’s pray that if we find ourselves in such a situation, that is who we will be.