

James 5.7-12 / Crossroads / 07.15.12

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title Page]** In the past ten years, I have preached at several churches, and I have often joked – especially with children – about how people might start throwing fruit if they don't like my preaching, but this is the first church I have been at where people were openly distributing tomatoes and potatoes before the service! Potatoes could hurt! I am glad, whatever you thought last week, that you took your produce home with you.
- I hope you laughed, because that's probably the only humor in today's sermon. I have planned an entertaining sermon for next week, but this week we are going to have a serious half hour, because we will be talking about enduring suffering, and I don't want to seem disrespectful of anything you might be going through. We will not be morbid! We will share some valuable truths today, which will help and bless everyone in the room.
 - *[Prayer]*

Introductory Illustration

- † I want to begin today with a story. Less than two weeks after Adoniram Judson married Ann in 1812, they set sail for the mission field, eventually ending up in Burma.
- Ann suffered a miscarriage on the voyage. They later had a son, but he died of fever after six months. All their time in Burma, they suffered frequent bouts of tropical fevers. This is not too surprising, since their homes were inundated with rats and all kinds of bugs.
 - For two years, they had to spend up to twelve hours a day in language studies, before they could begin to communicate effectively or translate the Bible. They faced periodic political persecution, which made it hard to build any deep relationships.
 - After five years in Burma, they did not have a single convert. Would you have continued on in the work? I am not sure I could have. In 1819, they were blessed with their first Burmese convert, by 1820 there were ten baptized members of the new church, and in 1823 Adoniram completed the New Testament in the Burmese language.
 - Then war broke out between Burma and England, and he was accused as a foreign spy and imprisoned. He had chains on his ankles, and at night the guards would hoist his feet up into the air so he had to sleep with just his head and shoulders on the ground. I wake up stiff and hurting because I don't like my new mattress; imagine how much pain each day brought him after sleeping like that. Each day saw more executions.
 - Eight months after Adoniram was confined, Ann gave birth to a daughter. Ann became sick again, and could not feed the baby. The guards permitted Adoniram to leave the prison twice daily to seek nourishment for the baby from other nursing mothers.
 - In 1825, after eighteen months of torturous imprisonment, Adoniram was released to help negotiate peace with England as a translator. While he was away, Ann and the baby died. Adoniram suffered severe depression for several years, isolating himself in the jungle.
 - When he recovered, he supported other missionaries and translated the Old Testament. It took until 1840 to finish editing the whole Bible, 28 years after he entered the mission field.
 - He would marry twice more, but his second wife would die, as would three more children, there would be another miscarriage, and he would rarely see any of his surviving children, before he himself died in 1850.

- Despite all this hardship and struggle, the Judsons pressed on in faith and obedience for decades. Could you have persevered through all that? The Judsons could have ended the hardship and struggle by returning in the US, so was it even worthwhile to persevere?
 - Yes! We should praise God for the blessings he brought through the Judsons; because of them, the Burmese received the Bible; and what they started there grew so today there are over two million evangelical believers in Myanmar, as Burma is now named.
- † Today we are going to look at James 5.7-12, in which James teaches his friends to patiently endure in the face of struggles, to continue walking in faith and obedience, because of the hope they have in Christ. If you are new to the Bible, James is toward the back, right after Hebrews.

Historical and Literary Context

- † **[Slide 2: Chapter Summaries]** As you might recall from last week, James was a brother of Jesus, who came to faith after the resurrection, and became one of the key leaders in the Jerusalem church. James wrote his letter to the believers who had fled Jerusalem to avoid persecution.
- In chapter 1, James exhorted his readers to *stand confidently*. They were experiencing persecution and poverty, but they could endure by holding fast to their hope in Christ.
 - In chapter 2, James exhorted his readers to *serve compassionately*. He argued that true faith in Christ would lead to transformation which would lead them to selflessly serve others.
 - In chapter 3, James exhorted his readers to *speak carefully*, because of the impact our words have on others. He chided them for praising God and then cursing people made in God's image.
 - In chapter 4, James exhorted his readers to *submit contritely*. He said the Christian life is one of humility, being humble before God and with each other.
 - In the beginning of chapter 5, James talked about how the rich and powerful of his day had been abusing and even killing the righteous. In vv.7-12, he addresses the humble believers and tells them to be patient, to strengthen their hearts, and to endure in faith and obedience.

Step One: Patiently Stand Firm in Faith

- † **[Slide 3: vv.7-8]** We will have two main points and two implications from those points today. Our first point is we must patiently stand firm in faith. James 5.7-8 NET: So be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's return. Think of how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the ground and is patient for it until it receives the early and late rains. ⁸ You also be patient and strengthen your hearts, for the Lord's return is near.
- † In the Old Testament, reference to the early and late rains always affirmed the faithfulness of God to keep his promises. James' people, being Jewish in background, would have understood that, and realized that James was reminding them of God's faithfulness in their day.
- They were no longer under the Mosaic Covenant that contained the promise of rain and fruitful crops; neither are we. You know that right? The prophets promised a new covenant to replace the Mosaic Covenant, and Jesus said he inaugurated the new covenant with his blood.
 - So James' friends were not under the covenant that promised rain and crops, but they still had assurance that God would be faithful to keep his promises in the New Covenant.
 - In the New Covenant, they knew they had salvation in Christ, so the bad things happening to them could not mean they were abandoned by God or no longer loved by God. In the New Covenant, they knew they had the Holy Spirit indwelling them, and thus they were never alone. These are important points for us to understand as well.

- † To be patient here means to accept our present suffering, while keeping our hope in Christ.
 - Where the NET says, “strengthen your hearts,” The NIV says, “Stand firm,” and the NLT says, “Take courage.” The Greek verb is **στηρίζω**, which is repeatedly used in the New Testament to signify strengthening or standing firm in faith. So we are to strengthen our hearts and stand firm in faith in the midst of our trials and temptations, continuing to walk in faith and obedience.

- † How can we patiently endure our suffering and continue to walk in faith and obedience? Because we put our hope in Christ’s deliverance.
 - James says Christ is returning soon. How soon? How could James say the end was near almost 2000 years ago? In the New Testament language, the “last days” started with the death and resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto the church. These “last days” will continue until Christ returns.
 - That return could happen at any time: it is what we call *imminent*. Thus the New Testament repeatedly calls on us to live as though Christ could return at any moment.

- † The hope of a Christian is based on Christ’s promised return.
 - If Christ returns now, he will deliver us out of our physical struggles. The man who is poor will be so no more; the woman who is sick will find healing. We will know no sadness or strife.
 - If Christ does not return right away, until that time God will deliver us through our present struggles and resurrect us from the dead when Christ does return.
 - We are never alone: God will empower us and sustain us through our trials. In chapter 1, James said trials were part of God’s plan to perfect our character.
 - Whether Christ comes now to deliver us out of our struggles or later and delivers us through our struggles, we know from several passages that when Christ returns, he will bring justice, and we will begin a new life in peace and health. It is easier to endure suffering if you know there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Eighty years of struggle in this life can seem like an eternity, but it actually is quite small compared to the true eternity of joy and peace that awaits us.

- † Another part of the new covenant was the promise of the restored kingdom. God the Father has anointed Christ as the rightful king, who is the ultimate representative of God the Father on Earth. But scripture tell us Christ has not come back yet to reign in his kingdom; he is sitting in Heaven next to God the Father, waiting until the time to come back.
 - This isn’t all bad, because while he is waiting, he continues to intercede for us. Romans 8.34 [NET] says, “Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us.” 1 John 2.1 [NET] says, “But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One.” When we make a mistake of sin, Jesus is there to say he has taken the penalty for us. This is part of our ongoing salvation, which will continue until we are raised from the dead and glorified in our bodies.
 - We also know from several passages [John 5.22; Acts 10.42; etc.] that God the Father made Christ the only rightful judge. When he returns, it will be to judge all people, bringing just punishment to the wicked and peaceful eternal life for the righteous.

1st Implication: Avoid Judging or Grumbling Against Each Other

- † **[Slide 4: v.9]** One implication of patiently standing firm is that we must avoid judging or grumbling against each other. James 5.9 NET: ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be judged. See, the judge stands before the gates!
- † As we discussed in James chapter 3, sometimes the stresses of life can tempt us to speak in ways that do not honor God or help his people. As we suffer and struggle through our trials, James says we are to endure patiently, not letting the stress of our circumstances lead us into conflict with each other.
- In James 4.11-12, he wrote that being critical and judgmental of each other were wrong. And we need to remember that Jesus commanded us (1) to focus during these last days on being witnesses for him [Matthew 28.19-20], and therefore (2) to avoid judging others [Matthew 7.1], and (3) to show love to even our enemies [Luke 6.27, 35].
- † We are God's people, under Christ. Christ is the head of the church [Ephesians 1.22; 5.23; Colossians 1.18], so as Christ represents God the Father, we represent Christ to the rest of the world.
- Part of having faith in Christ is trusting *him* to be the judge of others; and part of having faith is continuing to walk in faith and obedience – including showing love even to those who antagonize us – while we wait for Christ to return and judge.
 - If we judge other people, we sin, because we have not been given that privilege; only Christ is the rightful judge and in this time period of the last days, our focus as his representatives is not to *enforce* righteousness but to *represent* righteousness by showing love as we share the gospel.
 - Sometimes, someone dear to me acts like a terrible sinner. Knowing how he sins hurts me inside and sometimes what he does hurts me directly. It is right for me to hate his sin, and even to talk directly with *him* about it, but it would be wrong for me to think I am any better than he is or to treat him like I think that: we both have sinned against God; we both deserve eternal punishment; we both need the salvation Jesus offers.
- † Which brings up another point: James also reminds us here that even believers will receive judgment when Christ returns. While we are not in danger of losing our salvation, we will have to answer for our actions. That should be one more motivation for taking these commands seriously.

Step Two: Patiently Endure the Trials of Life

[Slide 5: vv.10-11] Our second main point is that we must patiently endure the trials of life. James 5.10-11 NET: ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. ¹¹ Think of how we regard as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and you have seen the Lord's purpose, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

- † Doing God's will does not always result in physical blessing. Many of the prophets who were doing God's will were killed. Even Christ and many of his disciples were killed, so we know– not only is doing God's will not a guarantee against suffering, but –doing God's will can cause our suffering!
- LeeAnn and I have been asked by bosses to do illegal or immoral things. Both of us risked our jobs to say we couldn't do it. Sometimes doing the right thing is what gets you into trouble.
 - Yet, even if we suffer, even if we suffer to the point of physical death, walking with God is the right path. We must be patient in our suffering, maintaining our spiritual integrity and trusting in God's deliverance.

- † In the NET, James says we regard as blessed those who have “endured.” The NIV says blessed are those who “persevered” and the ESV says blessed are those who “remained steadfast.” The Greek verb ὕπομένω and the associated noun ὕπομονή can mean all those things.
- In Matthew 5.11-12, Jesus said we would be blessed if we were persecuted for righteousness. In James 1.12, James wrote we are blessed if we endure testing or temptation, depending on how you translate the Greek word. What does it mean here to be blessed? Obviously it does not necessarily imply we will have an easy or good life.
 - In the story of Job, we see that God’s purpose was to refine Job and glorify himself. But Job had to suffer the loss of his entire family, his livelihood, his health, his dignity. Job, though righteous, could not expect to be immune from suffering; in fact, it was his righteousness that brought him into conflict with Satan.
- † **[Slide 6: top line bottom line chart]** To understand what Jesus and James mean by saying these people are blessed, let’s look at a chart that illustrates the choice we all face. I call this chart “Top Line/Bottom Line.” This chart is very useful in real life and for interpreting whether characters in Bible stories are behaving righteously.
- If we want to attain a goal or be delivered from a trial, there are two ways we can go about it. We can use human rationale to try to achieve the physical blessing we seek, or we can live God’s way and trust in his deliverance.
 - If we use human rationale – the bottom line – there might be a good probability for success, but it will involve some sort of sin, overtly by doing something wrong or subtly by putting our desires and will ahead of God’s. We lie on our resume to get the job; we cheat on our taxes and take supplies from our employer to make ends meet; we take advantage of someone’s trust to gain the upper hand; we neglect our family to play golf; we rely on alcohol, drugs, or porn to get relief... whatever shortcut we take, we are sacrificing our integrity for the sake of success.
 - If we take the top line, then we are walking according to God’s revelation and trusting him for deliverance to the physical blessing. But, we might not get the physical blessing we want. God doesn’t promise us a good job or wealth, he doesn’t promise us popularity or respect, power and influence, health or beauty. He doesn’t even promise to deliver us out of life threatening situations! Like we said earlier, prophets, disciples, and even Jesus died for doing the right thing.
 - So if we choose to walk with God on the top line, we are saying that we are willing to give up all those physical blessings for him, if that is his desire. God might grant our wish for physical blessing, but he might not, and either way, we are submitting to him.
 - This has to be a conscious decision: if you don’t consciously choose to live by God’s revelation no matter what, then you will slip back into the bottom line ways of the world when the pressure is on, rationalizing that these are special circumstances and God will understand.
- † Now, how can Jesus call people on the top line blessed, even when it leads to torture and death? Even if you don’t get the physical blessing you want, there is blessing in choosing God’s top line path. Even if we continue to suffer in poverty, persecution, loneliness, illness, pain, depression, or whatever it is you are suffering, we still will receive spiritual blessing for walking with God. This spiritual blessing includes include the following:
- (1) By walking in faith, you obtain God’s help to endure your trials.
 - (2) You will grow stronger in faith as you endure, instead of weaker in faith as you would have going your own way.
 - (3) As you grow stronger in faith, you grow more spiritually mature, preparing you to handle life and to do God’s work.

- (4) Choosing to trust in God and be obedient to his revelation, you will enjoy uninterrupted intimacy with him.
 - (5) This intimacy and your submission to him lead to experiencing the Fruit of the Spirit in fuller measure.
 - (6) Your example of walking in faith and obedience will be inspiring to others in the church and even to non-believers.
 - (7) You will earn treasure in heaven, treasure you can enjoy forever.
 - (8) Searching to understand God's way of life, you grow more enlightened about him and to be more Christ-like yourself.
 - (9) You will become a true follower of Christ, for he modeled obedience and dependence on God and taught obedience and dependence to his disciples.
 - (10) You will begin to understand how God looks at life and at you, which will help you make sense of what is happening in your life, which in turn will help you to rest in your hope in Christ and have God's perspectives on issues.
- † Paul said in Romans 8.28 that everything will work to the good of those who believe: this is true if we cling to God and his ways in this moment of trial: then we get the spiritual blessing. If instead we take the bottom line, it will prove spiritually destructive, even if we attain physical success. We might face chastening from God, we definitely will be forsaking intimacy with God and his help in enduring, and we will grow weaker in our faith, in our walk, and thus in our witness to others.
- † So how can we endure suffering in patience? We focus on obedience, we yield to the Holy Spirit to empower us, and we trust in God to deliver us. All the while, knowing that ultimately we will be delivered by Christ, even if it is through physical death.

2nd Implication: Maintain Your Integrity

- † **[Slide 7: v.12]** The implication of patiently enduring is that we must maintain our integrity at all times. James 5.12 NET: And above all, my brothers and sisters, 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 into judgment.
- † This command echoes that of Jesus in Matthew 5.34-37. Our integrity must be absolute, by which I mean we must at all times reflect the character of God. Our honesty and transparency should be so unassailable that we need not take an oath for our word to be recognized as our bond, as good as a legal written contract. Patient endurance will lead to integrity which will lead to trustworthiness.

Final Illustration

- † **[Slide 8: website]** I want to give you another illustration from the mission field. In 1921, David and Svea Flood moved from Sweden to the Congo with their two year old son.
- They lived in jungles, sometimes like animals, dealing with malaria, malnutrition, and hostile tribal leaders. In their couple of years there, they had only one convert, a young boy.
 - Their partners deserted them. Then Svea became pregnant, but the trials of birth and Malaria killed her when their daughter was only seventeen days old.
 - David snapped and closed down their outpost. The trip out of the jungle was so difficult, he had to leave his infant daughter with his former partners when he encountered them in a village. It

would be over forty years before he saw her again. When she found him, back in England, he was a bitter and sick man, living in poverty, depression, and alcohol.

- He began to weep and told her he never meant to give her away like that. When she assured him that God had cared for her, he got angry and spat, “God forgot all of us... Our lives have been like this because of him. I was in Africa all that time, and only one little boy...”
 - Her reply was stunning: She said, “You didn’t go to Africa in vain. Mama didn’t die in vain. The little boy you won to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. The little seed you planted just kept growing and growing. Today there are six hundred African people serving the Lord, because you were faithful to the call of God in your life.”
 - A few years later, she met that first convert, who now was the head of the Zaire National Church of 110,000 people. He said to her, “Thank you for letting your mother die so that we can live.”
 - David was convinced that he had suffered and worked for no apparent reason or result. But he learned over forty years later that the seed he and his wife planted through their own great suffering brought about a great harvest of faith and glory to God. While David was walking the top line, he was working for God’s glory; when he stepped off to the bottom line, it led to loss of his relationship with God and continued misery.
- † So you might not be able to see any positive results of your suffering and persevering right now, but they can be real and good all the same. God is always at work.
- LeeAnn and I dated for five years before we got married. It was a challenge to honor God all that time by not getting too physical in our relationship. As I told the teenage boys in the church, it might not have been as hard at age 35 as it was at 15, but it was still plenty hard enough! Just before our wedding, a teenage girl in the church whom we barely knew came up and thanked us for modeling a Christian relationship to the teens. We were stunned. We had had no idea that she was watching us, that we were inspiring her to be chaste as she began to go on dates. She not only remained chaste, but also served as a campus missionary for several years in Florida and in Italy. I am not saying we inspired all that by ourselves, but you never know what an impact you are having by which path you choose to take, top line or bottom line.
 - If you choose to stay on the top line, patiently enduring your poverty, illness, sadness, or whatever it is with which you struggle, you might be inspiring others to see the reality of Christ in you or to strengthen their own faith and walk with God. Conversely, if you choose to give up on the ways of God and seek resolution in the ways of man, you will bring no glory to God nor spiritual rewards to yourself nor be in a position to inspire others.
- † So remember: Patiently stand firm in faith and patiently endure the trials of life. Avoid judging or grumbling against each other and maintain your integrity as Christ’s representative at all times.
- I pray you *will* patiently endure, walking with God on the top line, waiting for Christ’s deliverance, knowing it will be worth the wait, even if it comes through death.