

## Patience in Suffering

James 5:7-12 - 7/26/20

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### Opening Illustration

Paul Harvey was a broadcaster for ABC News Radio from 1952 through 2008. He was best known for his statement "*You know what the news is, in a minute you're going to hear **the REST of the STORY***". 'The rest of the story' was a program that Paul Harvey created. He always started with a familiar story that his audience knew, and then added additional facts that were not well known, adding more to the story. For example, in one episode, he tells of a certain speech given by **President Lincoln**, and for this particular speech the President was sick and not feeling well as he was delivering it. The President felt the speech did not go over well, and it was even reported in the **Chicago Times** as - "**ignorant rudeness, an offensive exhibition of boorishness and vulgarity**". The rest of the story? The speech you might have guessed, was the famous Gettysburg Address, the sickness however, was **small pox**. President Lincoln was coming down with smallpox as he was giving the most famous speech of his Presidency. There was much to the rest of the story.

In our passage today, James is dealing with a subject that was very familiar to his original audience, and it a subject that we are all very familiar with today as well. His subject? - was 'suffering'. In our passage today, **James is telling them, that he sees their suffering, and acknowledges that it is very real...** But he helps them to see that **there is 'more to the story of suffering' for the Christian**. Now they... and us along with them... are going to hear from James about suffering and - 'the rest of the story'.

### Scripture: James 5:7-12

**7 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. 8 You also, be patient.** Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 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. 12** 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.

## Prayer

**Main Idea: When suffering, be patient by looking to Jesus**

- 1. When suffering - be Patient**
- 2. When suffering - be encouraged**

### **I. When suffering - be patient**

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- (7) *Be patient, therefore, brothers, (and sisters) until the coming of the Lord...*

**James is giving them direction in how to respond when they suffer**, even unjustly. In the proceeding verses (1-6) he is rebuking the actions of rich in society and those who are holding back the wages of the laborers they employed.

- *James 5:4 -Behold, <sup>a</sup>the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you...*

So, how does James instruct them to respond to this genuine suffering? To revolt? To forcibly take back what is due to them from their rich employers? To take them to the courtroom for justice? No... To be patient. For how long? Until the coming of the Lord.

**How is this encouraging instruction?** A call to be patient, while suffering, until the end of time? There must be more. The only way that this can bring comfort is for there to be **‘more to the story’**. More that James can share with them about

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<sup>a</sup> Lev 19:13; Job 24:10f; Jer 22:13; Mal 3:5

how to view their suffering, and how to be patient in it. To help them (and us) to see suffering in such a way that it does not eclipse their lives with anxiety that can consume them. James needs **to help them to see truth about God**, that can speak into their suffering **with hope**.

**But James is not simply giving them a command**, when he says to *'be patient'*. He then begins to tell them **how** to be patient while suffering, and **why** to be patient in suffering. James begins with the reality of this Christian life being a marathon and not a sprint, when he encourages them to remain patient *until the coming of the Lord*. James first illustrates for them this kind of patience by **looking at the Farmers**.

**The audience would know that if you were a Farmer**, inherent in the role of a farmer is patience.... you had learned to wait, you had to be patient, it is part of the job. Beyond the active work of planting, weeding, and caring for your crops, there was absolutely no control that you could exert to bring about the rain, or to cause the seed to become mature fruit before its time. You must trust the Lord with the germination, growth and the maturity of your crop, and the rain to cause all of this to take place. In Israel, **the farmer had to wait, and be patient, until the early rains came in order to have a successful planning**, usually in (Mid -October to mid -November). Then they had to wait and be patient, trusting that the late rains would come (mid-December to late January) and bring the grain to maturity before harvest. The farmer waits, **the farmer is patient**, waiting for the early and late rains, and **trusting God every with every step along the way**.

**The farmer had to wait with no guarantee** that the crop would come to full harvest, he could only trust God with his crop. James refers to the crop as *'precious'* in verse 7. Something that they labored over for months, would certainly be precious. On the heels of this illustration of the farmer, James then repeats the charge in verse 8 - when he says -

- (8) *'You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

James is telling them that by seeing the example of the Farmer, it should *'Establish'* or *'strengthen'* our hearts. **God is trustworthy**, God brings the early and late rains, **God brings the harvest**. Even though the farmer has no assurance that his precious crop will actually mature from one year to the next. The Farmer

is patiently waiting for planting time to come, for rains to come, for a crop to mature, for a harvest to be complete. **The farmer is always patiently waiting for something.**

**DA Carson says, ‘Christian waiting is not waiting for something but for Someone.’** And that ‘Someone’ begins ‘the rest of the story’. James is bringing to them, in the midst of their continual, unrelenting, suffering, another reason to trust God. Jesus is the reason they can be patient. **There is nothing that is more precious to a Christian than being with Jesus.** Not an end to trial, not untold riches, not good health, not marital bliss, not business success, not peace in our time, not anything. There is nothing as precious as Jesus to a Christian, and he is coming. We should live like Jesus is ‘at hand.’

You see, the farmer has no assurance that his precious crop will actually mature to harvest, year after year. But the Christian has full assurance for what we are patiently waiting for.... *the coming of the Lord*. James tells us that the Lord, or Savior, our Redeemer, is not only coming, but is ‘*at hand*’, or at the door. **Nothing can ever keep our precious Savior from coming for us.** It is certain. When Jesus comes, he is coming for us. He is reminding them that they are citizens of heaven, this is not their home. When they realize that this world, and this suffering is temporary, and the permanent is yet to come, patience becomes a choice.

- “Hope of eternity with Christ in heaven also enables my heart to thrive during the most difficult of trials here on earth. When looking at the sheer weight of unseen glories to come, my troubles seem light by comparison; and when looking at the staggering length of eternity, my troubles seem fleeting in comparison. It is only against the backdrop of a glorious eternity that my circumstances can be seen in such a manner; and the promise of this glorious eternity is part and parcel of the gospel itself.” Milton Vincent, *The Gospel Primer*.

James is helping them to see ‘the rest of the story’ when he says ‘**...the coming of the Lord is at hand.**’ He is helping them to look to Jesus, to fix their eyes on Jesus.

**Then James adds for them another example.** The farmer was a practical example of patience, now James turns to the prophets who were an example of both suffering and patience. In verse 10:

- (10) *As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold we considered them blessed who remained steadfast.*

**James points us to the example of those prophets that have gone before them.** Those that they have read about, heard about, those that have suffered, and suffered more than they, even to martyrdom. They could see the entire scope of their lives, and **how they trusted God, and God provided for them**, and finally took them home. Look at their example, the prophets they remained steadfast under their trials and suffering.

**As they considered the prophets - Isaiah, Jerimiah, Daniel**, and others who have walked on this earth and served God. They were freshly reminded of the stories and their examples of patience in the midst of severe suffering. They were examples of people, like them, but people **who stood firm until the end, because God was with them**. The prophets were patient while suffering beyond what they could even imagine for themselves, and they were steadfast, and considered blessed. God met them.

**The farmer - is a natural illustration of patience for them**, something they can relate to in their daily lives, something that they can see. The prophets were biblical examples that they could understand the charge to follow their example...

In the midst of these example of patience in suffering, **James gives a warning**. He then addresses what can they can do to affect their ability to follow these examples, and to be patient. He addresses their speech together.

- (9)- *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

James again using the language we heard in **chapter 4 verse 11 when he gives a command using “Do Not”**. He is again warning them to watch their language together, when they are enduring times of suffering. He gives us a strong admonition, similar to what we heard earlier. He addresses their speech together with others in the church, with ‘one another’. **He tells them ‘Do not grumble against one another, brothers...’** He wants them to see the importance of maintaining their unity together through tough times of suffering. When we grumble, we complain. James knows that in times of suffering, we can easily

become frustrated and even turn and blame one another. He is warning them of this.

Our suffering can take on many different forms, but it is still suffering. My own suffering can often feel to me like my situation, is more severe than what my brothers and sisters experience. So, James is warning us to watch our speech at these times. **“Do not grumble...” it affects our ability to patient in suffering.**

## **II. When suffering, be encouraged (9-12)**

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Then as James brings them the final example of suffering, he brings the story of Job to their attention. As James does this, we see James continuing to reveal to them the **‘Rest of the story’**.

**Job lost everything** - his wealth, his children, his status, his health, everything, all but his wife, who unfortunately was a source of grumbling to Job. This in itself can be a good illustration of how James wants them to see the effect of their speech on one another. Job’s suffering was well known by all. Job was not always patient in his suffering, just like you and me.

But despite his own grumblings, **Job never ceased to believe in God**. Though he complained, “the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart” (Barclay).

And **God was not distant or disconnected from Job’s suffering**. Regardless of how it may feel, God is never disconnected from our suffering either. God’s trustworthiness is not in question. We can trust Him with every moment of our suffering. Knowing, like with Job, there is never any unnecessary or unused moment of suffering in our lives.

### **Spurgeon:**

- “We must have seen, in Job’s story, if we have regarded it aright, that *the Lord was in it all*. It is not a narrative in which the devil is the sole actor, the great Lord of all is evidently present. He it was who challenged Satan to consider Job, and then questioned him as to the result. Less seen than the evil one, the Lord was nevertheless present at every act of the drama. God was not away while his servant suffered; in fact, if there was any place

where the thoughts of God were centered more than anywhere else in providence at that time, it was where the perfect and upright man was bearing the brunt of the storm. *The Lord was ruling too.* He was not present as a mere spectator, but as still master of the situation. He had not handed over the reins to Satan; far from it, for every step that the enemy took was only by express permission from the throne. He allowed him to strip his servant, but he set the limit, "Only upon himself put not forth thine hand." Charles Spurgeon

**Just as God is ruling through the suffering of Job, he is ruling through their suffering as well, and through ours.** And we have something more than what Job had. We have an advocate in Christ Jesus that is ever interceding for us, and sympathizing with us:

- Romans 8:34b - *"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."*
- Hebrews 4:14-16 - *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

**James directs their attention to the character of God** by using descriptions of God from the Old Testament - Exodus 34:6, Psalms 111:4

- 11b - *You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

**They could see how the Lord was compassionate and merciful to the prophets** in their suffering. They could see how the Lord was compassionate and merciful to **Job in his suffering.** And now James is telling them that **in the same way,** the Lord is compassionate and merciful to them in their suffering.

**Compassionate and merciful is describing the character of God.** His character never changes. James uses the present tense in reminding to them that the Lord is Compassionate and merciful - now. God has not forgotten the prophets in their suffering, **they experienced God's compassion and mercy** enabling them to

endure to the end. **Job experienced God compassion and mercy** that also enabled him to endure to the end of his suffering, and Christian, you too will experience God's compassion and mercy to the end of your suffering, and **He will not forget you in your suffering.**

- Whether you are dealing with constant **physical pain**, unrealized expectations in your life, unrelenting depression, continued unjust treatment in the workplace, **loss of a loved one**, unreconciled relationships, continual financial pressures, loneliness, deeply overburdened with life demands, **even the loss of normal life through the on-going Covid restrictions**. Whatever it is, suffering takes many forms and affects each one of us.

**God is not trying to make life hard for his believers**, but is instead showing his compassion and his mercy in assisting them to develop godly character and to put their investments in heaven, where they will last forever. **The Lord is compassionate and merciful - Now.** *'...the Lord is compassionate and merciful*

- "The reason that Jesus is in such close solidarity with us is that the difficult path we are on is not unique to us. He has journeyed on it himself. It is not only that Jesus can relieve us from our troubles, like a doctor prescribing medicine; it is also that, before any relief comes, he is with us in our troubles, like a doctor who has endured the same disease.... Our tendency is to feel intuitively that the more difficult life gets, the more alone we are. As we sink further into pain, we sink further into felt isolation. The Bible corrects us. Our pain never outstrips what he himself shares in. We are never alone. That sorrow that feels so isolating, so unique, was endured by him in the past and is now shouldered by him in the present." Ortlund, Dane C.. Gentle and Lowly (p. 42)

**Illustration of an iceberg** - The rest of the Story? Speaks about **God** being with us. **God** actively working in us. **God** being trustworthy. **God** being compassionate and merciful. **God** sending Jesus back for us.



**Knowing the rest of the story**, we should look at our suffering like it is an iceberg. It is real, and it is massive, but **what we see of God at work in our lives** is like what we see above the waterline, the 10%, what God is doing in me, and with me, and for me, is what is below the water line, the 90%. As we trust God in our suffering, as we look to him as **our advocate**, and as we anticipate our home with him in heaven, we can begin to allow **patience in our suffering** to describe us.

### **Application:**

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**1. When you are suffering, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.** - He is your advocate, He is interceding for you in your suffering. Remember, Christian you are waiting not for something but for someone. Remember the suffering that our Lord experienced was beyond what we could ever experience. He understands, Jesus sees your suffering and sympathizes our weaknesses.

**2. When others are suffering, encourage them to look to Jesus.** Help them to see a God that extends mercy and compassion to all of his children when they suffer. Help them to focus on the iceberg that is below the water line. That more describe the work of God in our lives.

### **Pray**

### **Benediction: Jude verse - 24**

***24** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, **25** to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time<sup>8</sup> and now and forever. Amen.*

