

James / James 5:7-20

Introduction

This morning we conclude our series through the Letter of James.

Throughout this letter, James has reminded his readers again of their need to return to the teachings and pattern of Christ.

You can almost imagine James saying, “Have you so quickly forgotten that Jesus suffered and died? Do you now remember what Jesus told his disciples? “‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” ([John 15:20](#)).

Instead of responding to their suffering in violent anger, James wants his readers to, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let the steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

James wants his audience and God wants you to grow mature in your faith, “lacking nothing”. And the conclusion to James’ letter is therefore fitting. James rounds out his letter by encouraging his audience on how to bear their suffering. James does this in three ways:

1. Bear suffering Patiently
2. Bear suffering in Community
3. Bear suffering in prayer

Bear Suffering in Patience (vv. 7-12)

On Thursday I spent a few minutes with the children in Bible class talking about patience. I asked them when when they were tempted to not be patient and there were two basic answers. It is hard to be patient when you are waiting for something your really want or enduring something you don’t enjoy.

A couple examples of the first were waiting for your birthday or waiting in line for ice cream. An example of the second was having to be quiet in the car when one of your parents is on the phone.

In verse 7 James calls his audience to be patient with both of these things in view. They were enduring persecution and patience is difficult when you are going through something hard. But they were also looking forward to something, specifically, “**the coming of the Lord.**” They looked forward to the day when Jesus would vindicate them and make things right.

On Thursday morning I also asked the children what they are tempted to do when they aren’t being patient. What does it look like when they aren’t patient? Very quickly one of the students said that they **complain**.

James draws this same connection in verses 8-9, “**You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the judge is at the door.**”

When God places his people in difficult circumstances, he does so to mature them. And this process of maturation requires patience.

Many of you are raising children. There are easy seasons and difficult seasons with every child. If you are in a difficult season, God is seeking to mature you as a parent. You are called to the slow and steady work of disciplining your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This work requires patience.

In this work, you may be tempted to grumble. To grumble at your child, your spouse, or anyone who will listen. But this failure of patience is ultimately **a failure to trust in God.**

To trust in God means trusting that He ordains these seasons in order to mature you through them. [Romans 8](#), “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

So whatever the season of difficulty is, James reminds us that grumbling is not the way. Rather, we are called to patiently trust in God’s love for us and his promise to vindicate his people in the end.

Examples

James offers a couple of examples that are worth considering in this first section.

First, James speaks of the farmer who waits until the crop has received ***the early and the late rains***. Farming is a perfect metaphor for what patient faith looks like. A farmer must patiently wait for the rains to fall on his crop in order to reap a harvest. The farmer can plant and cultivate, but unless the Lord gives the rains and the growth, there won't be a harvest.

Similarly, you are called to patiently wait for God to bring about a harvest of righteousness in your life. Just as Paul wrote the Corinthians, "I planted, Apollos watered, but the Lord gave the growth." ([1 Cor. 3:6](#))

The second example is James's references to the prophets who suffered and to Job. By harkening back to the examples of the Old Testament, James reminds his audience that they are in a long line of saints who God has brought through suffering and vindicated on the other side.

Job underwent great suffering. And while Job brought his complaint to God, he did not grumble. And there is a difference! James is not calling Christians to a detached stoic perseverance through suffering. No, patience in suffering does not mean you can't cry out to God. This is what Job does and James uses him as an example.

Oaths and Zealotry

This first section closes in verse 12 with James talking about oaths. This may seem odd, but when you remember the context, it makes sense. There were groups of men in Israel during this time known as "Zealots". They would make oaths with one another to take violent revolutionary action against the Roman Empire.

For the zealots, the solution to every problem was to take up revolutionary arms against Rome. In Jesus' own lifetime he was tested in this regard when he was asked by his disciples and opponents if he would defeat or resist the Romans.

Zealotry was not the way of Jesus and James is teaching that it is also not the way of the church. Instead of making great oaths by heaven or earth, Christians

should seek to lead, as the Apostle Paul says, “peaceful and quiet lives, godly and dignified in every way.” ([1 Tim 2:2](#)).

Bear Suffering in Community (vv. 13-16a)

Patience in their suffering was the way James encouraged his audience *but they were not to suffer in isolation from one another*.

In verses 13-16 James paints a picture of how the Christian church is to live in community with each other in the midst of suffering.

In verse 14 James gives the example of those who are sick calling the elders of the church to pray for them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And, in the first part of verse 16, James calls for the church to confess their sins to one another and pray for one another.

When James speaks of those who are sick calling upon the elders, the language is particularly about those who are sick or injured so that they are isolated from the rest of the community. The elders coming to them to anoint them with oil and pray for them is all about their ongoing connection to the church.

In verse 16, James writes of a community that is marked by the confession and forgiveness.

James calls his hearers to participate in practices that will form a **thick community**.

So many of the practices of modern culture tend to isolate people. There is an epidemic of loneliness not only in America but throughout the modern world. More and more people work jobs that remove them from community and there are fewer and fewer accessible outlets for people to form meaningful community.

As the church, we are to embody a different form of human community. This community is marked by care for the weak and the confession of our sins to one another. The Christian church is called to live in service to one another.

In a world where people are lonely and isolated from one another, the church is to be a community where people are connected with one another. This

connectedness cannot happen unless there is genuine repentance and forgiveness. It also cannot happen without genuine fellowship with one another.

We gather around the table each Sunday. We all partake from the same table of bread and wine. The Eucharist is a symbol of our life together. What we do here each week is to be the life that enlivens the rest of our lives. Our table fellowship here should translate to fellowship beyond the walls of the church.

So this is James' call to you, life in genuine community with one another. And when suffering arises, care for and help one another.

Bear Suffering in Prayer (vv. 16b-20)

James brings this all to a conclusion by calling his hearers to prayer. He writes, ***“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”***

He then goes on to speak of Elijah who ***“prayed fervently that it might not rain [and then] prayed again, and heaven gave rain.”***

Elijah lived in the face great opposition. King Ahab and his wife Jezebel murdered the prophets of God and persecuted the faithful remnant in Israel.

Despite this, God called Elijah to a unique form of ministry. While Elijah did confront the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, much of his ministry was quite obscure. In the face of such opposition, God called Elijah to be a man of prayer.

James calls the church in a similar ministry. To pray and to live as a faithful remnant even in the midst of marginalization.

These two themes of prayer and communal life are central to James' admonition to patience. It is hard to be patient all on your own. But when you have the support of others there is much encouragement.

In verses 19 & 20 James ends his letter by writing, ***“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”***

James tells this young suffering church that they must endure their suffering together. They must trust that God is working all things together for their good.

As they do this in the community of the church, they will be able to help one another from falling away.

So the admonition to you this morning is similar. Let each one of us continue to pray for and encourage one another in the church to not turn from Christ. Let us all continue in repentance and forgiveness with one another. Even as God has forgiven each one of us in Christ.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!