



Introduction

James 5

I thought we'd begin this week with a bit of Trivia. You want to know

what this is?



This is considered the oldest known complaint in the world. It's 4000 year old Akkadian cuniefom tablet written by a man named Nanni who complains about a substandard ingot of copper he received by the hand of his servant and in the letter he demands a refund.

Complaining, as it turns out, is one of the oldest art forms in history.

We can complain about anything from a copper ingots to cold weather to people cutting in line, to poor customer service, our unreasonable boss to a boring movie to an overpopulated city and it's traffic, and the worst of all, not being able to connect to wifi.

But sometimes our complaints center on things that are much less trivial. Sometimes our complaints arise out of deep suffering. When we are pinned down in an uncomfortable situation, we complain by demanding an answer to the why question? Why am I suffering?

Why this betrayal? Why this death? Why this injustice? What this financial hardship? Why my marriage? Why my are my children like this? Why am I here? Lord, why don't you change things?

Last week James gave us three commands on how to be righteous in the face of suffering and not complain.

Be patient, trust God and don't complain.

Now this week James is going to work that out through EXAMPLES. Examples are helpful because examples are simply commands applied in real life situations. He says, let me point you to some biblical examples of people who did a good job of being patient, trusting God and not complaining in their impossibly hard situations. So James give us the prophets and God's servant, Job. So let's start with the prophets.

The Prophets

James 5:10-11, 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.

Now the prophets are amazing. The prophets have been given the most unrewarding of all possible jobs.

Let's first consider Isaiah

Isaiah

When we open up the book of Isaiah we see God's assessment of the nation of Israel. God says, my people have not heeded any of my warnings. They don't even know me.

Isaiah 1

Isaiah 1:2-3, Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

And for the rest of chapter 1 and into the next chapters he outlines the many ways in which Israel has turned away. Now in Isaiah 6, the prophet Isaiah has a vision of God and it's breathtaking. It really just knocks Isaiah on the carpet.

And the Lord says, Isaiah, will you go to my people and preach who I am. Will you preach what you just saw.

And he said by all means. Yes, I'll go! Send me!

But here's where it gets interesting. Isaiah, I'm not sure your going to like your mission. I'm going to send you to preach the gospel to my people for the next 20 or 30 years and no one will listen, believe or respect you in any way. Ever. You will never see fruit in your ministry your entire life. You will live your entire life without witnessing a shred of evidence that anything you ever said or did mattered.

I'm letting you know in advance that they will never respond no matter how much you beg and plead. They will persecute you, marginalize you and basically make your life miserable until you die.

- In fact your job is to harden hearts by speaking truth and being rejected.
- The more you try to show them truth the blinder they will become.
- The more you try to get their attention the heavier their eyes will become until they just fall asleep.
- The more you talk the more plugged up with wax their ears will become.

Look at Isaiah 6.9

Isaiah 6

Isaiah 6:9-10, And he said, Go, and say to this people:
'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on
seeing, but do not perceive.' 10 Make the heart of this
people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts, and turn and be
healed.

And Isaiah responded, "Well that doesn't sound like much fun? How long do I have to do that Lord?"

Isaiah 6:11, Then I said, How long, O Lord? And he said:
Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses
without people, and the land is a desolate waste,

Isaiah 6:12, and the LORD removes people far away,
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the
land.

Preach the truth until everyone is judged. Preach until a foreign nation obliterates them and they are utterly destroyed. Okay, now get going. That's hard.

God, why? Why would you want me to do that? Why do you want me to beat my head against the wall with ZERO results? You want to talk about a job that might require a little patience. You want to talk about a situation in which you might be tempted to complain? Isaiah can relate.

James says look at the prophets. What do you think was motivating Isaiah? What caused him to go year after year after year, watching the horrible hard-heartedness that led to destruction. What enabled him to keep going? What enabled him to keep preaching to this stiff-necked rebellious people?

What was able to not complain and be patient?

Think about it. CAN YOU GUESS WHAT IT IS?

Jeremiah

Consider Jeremiah. Jeremiah preaches during the Babylonian invasion of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar is steaming forward.

Jeremiah, go tell Jehoiakim that I'm going to use Nebuchadnezzar as a rod to discipline the nation of Israel. You have disobeyed me; therefore you will be destroyed by him.

- Jehoiakim sees Babylon assembling for battle and they are scurrying about like ants trying to prepare for battle and God says, "Jeremiah, Go up to the king and here's what I want you to tell him to his face." Prophecy over him and tell him that he is going to lose this battle."
- Tell Jehoiakim, "the right thing to do is to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar and to submit to him."

Okay, that's your job. Now go.

Jeremiah argued to God. God I'm only a child; I don't know how to speak to kings. But God says, "That excuse doesn't work. I'll give you the words. Get yourself ready!"

Jeremiah says, "Are you kidding me? Everybody is going to think I'm a traitor! **You really think he's going to listen to this message: Hey, Jehoiakim, you know that pagan overlord, Nebuchadnezzar? Yeah, well, God wants you to Give up and let him take you into captivity. They're going to think I'm a traitor."

And that's exactly what happened. They did think he was a traitor. In Jeremiah 11 we read of all the friends in his hometown (these are

his elementary school classmates, those who group up together, they all assemble and say, we have to kill this guy. He's spreading the language of sedition.

We read of the temple prophets conspiring to kill him. Jeremiah discovers the plot to kill him and he complains to the Lord about his persecution and the Lord responds by telling him. "Oh, don't worry, it's going to get way worse."

And sure enough. Jeremiah is beaten and put in stocks. He is thrown into a cistern where he starts sinking in mud. They are starving him. We call Jeremiah the weeping prophet. He writes a book in our Bible called Lamentations. But he can't stop speaking. He just keeps speaking.

**You want to talk about a job where you might be tempted to complain? How about Jeremiah? God why? James says, look at the prophets. What do you think was motivating Jeremiah? What caused him to sit in that muddy pit and trust God? What do you think motivated him to keep on speaking despite the terrible suffering and persecution?

Think about it. CAN YOU GUESS WHAT IT IS?

Hosea

Then you have Hosea. God comes to Hosea, and he says, "Hosea, you're never going to be any kind of prophet until you understand what the betrayal of the nation of Israel feels like to the heart of God. So here's what I want you to do. I want you to marry a prostitute. I want you to marry a woman who will never be faithful to you. I've given her a fitting name, Gomer. You're going to marry Gomer, and

she's going to continually be unfaithful to you."

God says, "She's going to continually commit adultery. It's going to just absolutely gut you. You are going to love her to death and she's going to have affair after affair after affair. You're going to have to continually forgive her and go get her and buy her back and carry her back to your home. And you are going to love her again even though she hurt you so badly. And you are going to have to go through that difficult process of rebuilding trust.

That's the training routine you are going to need to suffer in order to be a usable prophet in my hands. So I just want you to live that life on repeat for the next 30-40 years. Cool? You good with that?

You want to talk about a job where you might be tempted to complain. I think Hosea can relate. God why? James says, look at the prophets. What do you think was motivating Hosea? What caused him to go year after year after year, watching the unfaithfulness of his wife. What enabled him to forgive time after time after time. I mean can you imagine the sorrow. Just horrible sorrow all the time.

God says to all these prophets, "Get going." Hosea. Get going. Jeremiah. Get going. Get going, Isaiah. Their lives were suffering. They never had answers. Nothing ever went right for them. God says, "I want you to obey me. Be patient and don't complain.

What do you think caused the prophets to be so patient? What do you think motivated them to keep serving the Lord despite terrible suffering and persecution?

Think about it. CAN YOU GUESS WHAT IT IS?

I'm baiting you aren't I? You want to know. Be patient. I'm helping you practice patience.

We are supposed to look at the prophets. The prophets are given as an example. But we are also supposed to look at Job.

Job

James 5:11, You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Let's think about the patience of Job. Man, this is so good. Now to understand the lesson of Job you have to understand the structure of the book and the structure of the book of Job is a little odd. The story is found at the beginning and the end. In the middle you have these long speeches.

When we open the book we read of the integrity and character of the man Job.

- He was a man who feared God and turned away from evil.
- He was an upright man.

- He was blameless in all his ways.
- He was a devout man, and he also was an extremely wealthy man.

Now Satan comes and says, "I see this servant of yours, Job. I see how he's kind of your poster child. He's pretty hot stuff." Well, he's amazing for a reason. The dudes' filthy rich. Job has learned not to bite the hand that feeds him. He's wise. Does Job serve you for nothing? The only reason he's serving you is because you've blessed him. In other words he doesn't love you. He loves your blessing.

Take away his cash and he'll curse you. You can prove where his devotion lies by taking away his assets.

So God allowed it. **One day Job was standing in his home, and a messenger comes up and says,

- "I was herding your your donkeys and plowing with your oxen, and plunderers, those wretched Sabeans, well they came and attacked and took them all and killed the servants, and I alone have escaped to tell you.**" Well there goes his food supply.
 - And while the words were still in his mouth a second servant comes running up, and he says, "I was with your sheep, and lightning came down from the sky and destroyed all the sheep and all the servants, and I alone have escaped to tell you."
- And while the words were still in his mouth another comes and says the Chaldeans came and formed three bands and took all your camels and killed all your servants. This is basically the equivalent of saying your entire retirement portfolio has been wiped out. Your stocks gone. Your houses burned down and insurance won't pay and even your bars of gold you buried in the ground were dug up and robbed. All of his earthy capital is gone. He's financially ruined. He's now poor. That's a lot to absorb. - And while the words were still in his mouth another servant came up and said, I was in the home where all of your grown children were feasting and drinking

wine together, and a wind came out of the wilderness and the house collapsed, and all of your children are dead, all ten, seven sons and three daughters, and I alone have escaped to tell you these things."

Now after the first stroke from Satan, we are told that Job howls in sorrow. *He rips his clothes, shaves his head, falls to the ground in ashes and says, "Naked I came into the world, and naked I will return.* The Lord gives. The Lord takes. Blessed be the name of the Lord." In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing. That is pretty stinking impressive.

Now that introduction and the initial commentary has caused many people to misunderstand the book. Some people use this as the interpretive key for the book. Okay, Job was a righteous man, blameless. Satan attacked him and he didn't crack. So they read everything through that lens.

True enough. Job was righteous. Job was blameless. There was not a better man on the earth. He was the top tier. He was the upper crust.

But the story of the book of Job is that trials crush even the righteous. Trials wear you down. Trials cause even the finest poster children to crack. Trials are too much for all of us. All of us will crack eventually.

There's a saying in the Navy Seals about fear of water. "All men panic. It's just a matter of when."

And so it is with trials. All men eventually doubt God. All men eventually sin. All men crack. It's just a matter of when. Show me one who does not? At the first stroke, his self-control holds. Job

hasn't cracked, yet.

So the pressure turns up.

There was a second stroke of Satan. Now Satan attacks his health. We're told he was afflicted with these running sores. He sat on an ash heap, and he scraped himself with pieces of pottery, scouring the puss off. It says he was afflicted with these sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. I mean that has got to just be terrible misery. I've run into poison ivy several times in my life and I just absolutely hate that stuff. It's just so itchy. The sores just run for weeks. It's so gross. From the top of the head to the sole of the foot. Head to toe. Can you imagine.

Some people after funerals get consolation cards, meals cooked for them, phone calls. Job buries his 10 kids and loses his entire retirement portfolio and to boost his spirits he's given head to toe bleeding sores.

Now that's bad. That's really bad. But I think the absolute worst comes next. I think what made him crack was not:

- the loss of money.
- Not the loss of children.
- Not the loss of health.
- It was the loss of being believed by his closest friends.

Along come four terrible counselors. The first was Job's wife.

She's a piece of work. Here Job is suffering. He's covered in sores and she looks at him and says, "Curse God and die!" Obviously this is an indication of where she's at. She's mad at God. She's lost all her kids. She's convinced God is evil. She's cursing at God. And

she wants her husband to do the same. She's trying to drag him down with her.

Look at his response. It's remarkable. You see he is still barely holding on, but he is still holding on by the tips of his fingers. He says, "You are talking like a foolish woman." He doesn't say, "You are a foolish woman." He says, "We've been around foolish women. You and I have both agreed what foolish behavior looks like. What your saying feels awful similar to that." It's a very kind response to someone who says to you, "Curse God and die!**"

Next up were Job's three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Now Job's friends come along and take a totally different approach. They say, "No, God's not the problem. God can't be the problem. God is perfect. God is holy. And that is like a breath of fresh air to Job." "Yes, I was just trying to tell my wife that. That's so comforting to hear. Thank you for saying that. I agree, God can never be wrong. He is all wise! He's always good."

But what comes next is like a baseball bat to the knees. Job's friend say, "So if God is good. If God is not to blame, the only one left is you. Job, you're the problem." They say, "I've never seen an innocent man perish like you. Obviously, You're to blame. God doesn't judge the righteous."

Oh man, that hurts. That's deep. He cries out. He yells. He screams.

So Job's wife says: "God's the problem.** God is to blame."
Job's friends says: "Your the problem"

And I think he cracks. Right there. And in his agony for 35 chapters

he basically asks two questions:

- Why didn't I die at birth?
- Why is God not answering me?

He says, I am an innocent sufferer. I am righteous. I have done nothing to deserve this. This is senseless suffering. Why?

Why won't God talk to me? Why is the heavens as bronze? Why? In Job 23 he says, "If only I knew where to find him; if only I could go to his dwelling! I would state my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would find out the reasons, and consider what he would say."

You see, Job is just like us. He's asking, "why?" And what's the answer? Silence. Be patient. He gets nothing. He gets silence as a response. Why are you allowing this to happen? It would be one thing if I could see a reason.

If it was because I had sinned, that would make sense. Okay, this is punishment for my sin.

Or there was some greater purpose. I could handle that. It would be one thing if I could discern a reason. This trial will accomplish this purpose. Okay, now I have a reason to suffer.

But I am innocent and you are silent. Why? Why am I suffering?

To be patient and not complain and live in great suffering is among the hardest places in the world to be. Wait. Trust me.

Now, here's what I want to point out. By the time we get to chapter

38, Job has officially cracked. Here the most righteous man on the face of the earth has cracked under suffering. He's cracked. He's doubting God. He's angry. He's questioning God.

Everyone cracks. Listen, the prophets cracked too.

- You don't think Isaac cracked when he watched innocent children being slaughtered because of the hard-heartedness of Israel? Of course he did!
- You don't think Hosea cracked when he got the news that his wife was sleeping with another man? Of course he did!
- You don't think Jeremiah cracked while his feet were sinking in the mud? Read Lamentations. That's a poem written by a broken heart. Of course he did!
- And here is Job. Cracked!

And yet James says, "Consider the prophets. Consider Job."

What does that mean? The lesson to learn from the prophets and Job is NOT how NOT to crack. It's what to do when you do. Or even more accurately, the lesson is what God will do for you when you crack.

We looked at Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and asked what do you think motivated them to keep on serving God in their terrible suffering and persecution? What did they do? CAN YOU GUESS WHAT THEY DID? Here's the answer: They did nothing. God did something.

In all these cases, what happens is that his beloved children crack and God shows up and puts them back together. And how he shows up to do that is shocking.

The Rebuke

Since we are in Job, let's just keep going here. In Job chapter 38, near the end, God shows up. Job is not doing well. And God appears in this great storm and whirlwind. Job has been asking the why question for 35+ chapters. And finally God shows up and here's how he answers.

There are two things here that are just absolutely astonishing to me. First, God doesn't give Job a reason. He doesn't tell him why?

We might have ideas as to what God is up to but he doesn't say one thing about it to Job. Job has been asking for chapters and chapters why, and God says not a thing about it. He gives no explanation.

So first, He doesn't tell him why, but secondly, he doesn't give him any comfort. We don't read God saying, "Job, I'm so sorry for your loss. I'm so sorry that you lost your wealth and your children and I see those terrible painful sores. It must have been so terrible to go so long and not understand. I am so, so sorry. We get none of that.

The absence of that language is so shocking to me that it almost makes me want to throw away the book. How cold can you be? It's like God just has ice in his veins. Are you kidding?

Not only does he not give Job comfort, he goes on the offensive. He goes on the attack. Over and over God says, "Who are you? Who do you think you are?"

I mean the language is so harsh, I just shrink back.

God says to Job,

Job 38

Job 38:1-2, Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 2 Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Job 38:3-5, Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. 4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements-surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

Surely, you know Job, Surely, you were there. You're talking like you are so old. You're talking like you are so wise.

So surely, the lightning bolts report to you. They come to you and say, "Here we are. Which way would you like us to go, Job?" They

do that for me, so surely that do that for you too, since you seem to have so much knowledge of the way things ought to be?

Surely you understand how to make stars. That's easy, right? Like billions of them, right?

Surely, since you know so much about how your life should go and how it fits into my great plan of redemption, surely you know about these petty small little detail. Right?

Oh you don't know? You don't have understanding about these things? Well, then maybe you should trust me.

That feels like the opposite of compassion. And we think, God, what are you doing to this broken man? We feel like God is making a mistake here. But let's not commit the same sin that Job just committed telling God how he should instruct his children. God you don't know how to discipline your children. You're too harsh. You haven't read the positive affirmation books at Barnes and Noble.

What God says totally works. Look what comes out of Job's mouth. Job stammers out a first response. You know what comes out? Repentance. The great theme of the book of James. Repentance.

Job was written NOT to tell you how to NOT crack. It was written to tell you what to do when you do crack. In fact, it was written to crack you and then put you back together. And how does Job help put us back together. Through the beautiful, wonderful work of repentance. What a gift. What a healing balm. To just repent. To just say, "I thought I knew what was best. What a fool, to ever question you. I repent, Lord."

Listen to Job's repentance.

Job 40

Job 40:4-5, Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. 5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.

And you think, man, okay, Job really learned his lesson. Okay God you can be done.

Do you know what God says? "I'm not finished. I'll tell you when I'm done."

Job 40:6-7, Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 7 Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.

"Job, you think I am unjust? Must I be condemned that you be justified?

Is that how this should be. It doesn't make sense to me, so I should be the one who is repenting to you? Does that make sense, Job?

Either I am competent to judge God or God is competent to Judge me. Which is it?

Job, your suffering is 1000 times worse simply because you assume you can understand all these things. How could that be? Were you there when I invented the molecular structure of the universe? Were you there when I invented snow? Were you there when I laid the foundations of the earth? Were you there when I said to trillions of stars, come forth? Job, you weren't. How could YOU know? Who do you think you are to question me?

Either I'm God or you are. Either I'm right or you are. Either I know

what's going on or you do. I'm appealing to you. Think.

It's not possible, Job, that you are wiser than me.

You want justice, Job? You think this unfair. Try your own hand at justice, Job. Look at every proud man and bring him low. Crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them in the dust, and then I will concede that you are in a position to be the determiner of justice."

Now all of this is too much for Job.

Job 42

Job 42:1-3, Then Job answered the LORD and said: 2 I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

Job 42:4-6, 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' 5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; 6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Think about the phrase, don't obscure my counsel without knowledge. When you throw up complaints against God, you want to know what that does. It obscures God's wisdom. All of the sudden something that should never be questioned, comes into question. It's like a thick fog descends and now all of the sudden that mountain range in the distance is no longer visible. I'm confused which way is north.

You know this is no different than Isaiah. What happened to Isaiah. He's brought into the the throneroom of the Lord of Hosts. And he sees the Lord high and lifted up and the cherubim on the throne screaming Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is filled with his Glory.

And Isaiah smashes his face into the dirt and says, whoa is me for I am ruined. I am man of unclean lips. How dare I ever question the Lord. Who do I think I am?

That turbulence inside Isaiah is put to rest when he sees God. The turbulence inside of Job is put to rest when he sees God.

The anger goes away. That pride evaporates. They are changed men. They don't have all the answers, but they have what they need to be content. To trust. To not complain or grumble.

The thing that so upset me is it seemed like God came and did all the wrong things to Job, and yet, look?

Sometimes God asks for trust without a reason. God asks for trust without compassion. Why? Because now the trust is complete. It's the highest form. It's the most complete form of love.

Is that hard? Yeah, of course, it's hard. When you have cancer or your spouse just left you or you lost everything, or whatever, we are just bawling our eyes out. We are cracked. We are laying on the ground, cracked in a million pieces. Can you listen to God in that moment?

God is no more distant from you than he was from Job. God is not more distant from you than he was from Jesus was he cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me. Even Jesus asked the why question."

Conclusion

Remember, Job and the prophets are not here to tell you how not to crack. They tell you what to do when you do.

And what should you do? Run to Christ.

That's what Job did. At the very end of the book of Job, God commends Job. He says, "My servant Job did the right thing." Job had some pretty low days. He had some pretty ugly moments. He cursed the day he was born. He accused God of injustice. He ranted and raved. He was filled with self-pity. It was terrible. He cracked.

But what did he do right? He repented of thinking he knew better than God. He went looking for the WHY. He never found it. But you want to know what he did find? He found the who. He found the who and that was enough. He was satisfied. He found someone he could trust with the why.

Remember the cross. Those in Jesus day said, "THIS MAKES ZERO SENSE." Why God? Why would you allow this? God what are you doing?

I'm guessing many lost their faith when they watched Jesus hang on the cross. They said, "How in the world could this be?" And yet God turned that into the greatest act of mercy in the world. Can you trust him with the unknowns in your life knowing he has done that?



FAITH *that* WORKS

THE BOOK OF JAMES