



Introduction

James 5

Well this is one of three messages left in the book of James. Then

Palm Sunday and then Easter. One of the comments I've heard over and over through our study of James is this: "Man I love James because it's so practical." And it's true. James talks about so many aspects of every day life, the tongue, money, trials, etc...

Well if you like, practical, it doesn't get any more practical than today.

When we attend a funeral, perhaps one of the greatest compliments that can be said of a person during that funeral is something like: "Man, her life really counted. His life had an impact. That was a life well-lived."

We all want our life to count. We all want to matter. We all want to make an impact.

So how do we do that? You want to know the recipe James gives for having a kingdom impact, to really making your life count, to really doing something with your life that has value?

Be patient, trust God and don't complain.

What we are going to see today is that the heroic moments of the Christian life are actually forged in the mundane corners of everyday life. This is where character is hammered out. This is where the real stuff comes out. This is HEAVEN'S stage. Why? Because it's easy to be a hero at work; it's easy to be a hero when the spotlight is on you; it's easy to be a hero on the screen. It's hard to be a hero at home in the normal every day grind of life.

Many of you are stuck in that grind right now. You are stuck in an unfulfilling job. You are bored. You want to pull your hair out from

cleaning up after toddlers, changing diapers and reading Dr. Seuss Books. You are thinking, how does this even matter?

James is showing us in the passage today that the big spiritual battles are not at dramatic, historical, spotlight kinds of moments. Today what we are going to see is that the big spiritual battles for your soul, the thing that's going to shake the foundations of the kingdom of the enemy is to simply be patient, trust God and not complain.

Let's see how this works.

Review

Remember last week we began by noting that the primary focus of the Bible isn't social reform. It doesn't give us a style of government to address the economic disparity we see in the various classes of people.

Rather, depending on where you find yourself in the social structure, God gives you commands on how to conduct yourself such that you will honor the Lord wherever you find yourself.

Last week, James addressed the rich. And it was pretty harsh. His tone was unforgiving and contained precisely zero nuance. He was really serious about the danger of loving money and what that would do to our soul. Last week James was addressing the rich.

But this week we get the other side of that. What if you find yourself not rich, but suffering under the rich. What if you find yourself oppressed in some way. Well, James has something to say to you this week as well. He talks about how we should conduct ourselves

if we find ourselves in this situation.

So let's read verses 7-9 and keep in mind, the context is impending judgment for the rich. He's going to begin with a 'THEREFORE.' Knowing that God will judge the rich for their self-indulgence, AS A LOGICAL OUTFLOW OF KNOWING THAT THE JUDGE IS COMING, he now says to the poor who are suffering under the rich, 'THEREFORE'

James 5:7-9, 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.

So if verses 1-8 was addressing:

- how to be wealthy, powerful AND ALSO righteous, verses 7-9 tells us
- how to be poor, powerless AND ALSO righteous.

Again, no call for reforms here. No calls for social justice warriors to come swooping in to rescue the oppressed. Instead a call to glorify God by being godly and righteous.

The three points of the outline come out of the three commands in the text.

HOW TO BE RIGHTEOUS UNDER OPPRESSION

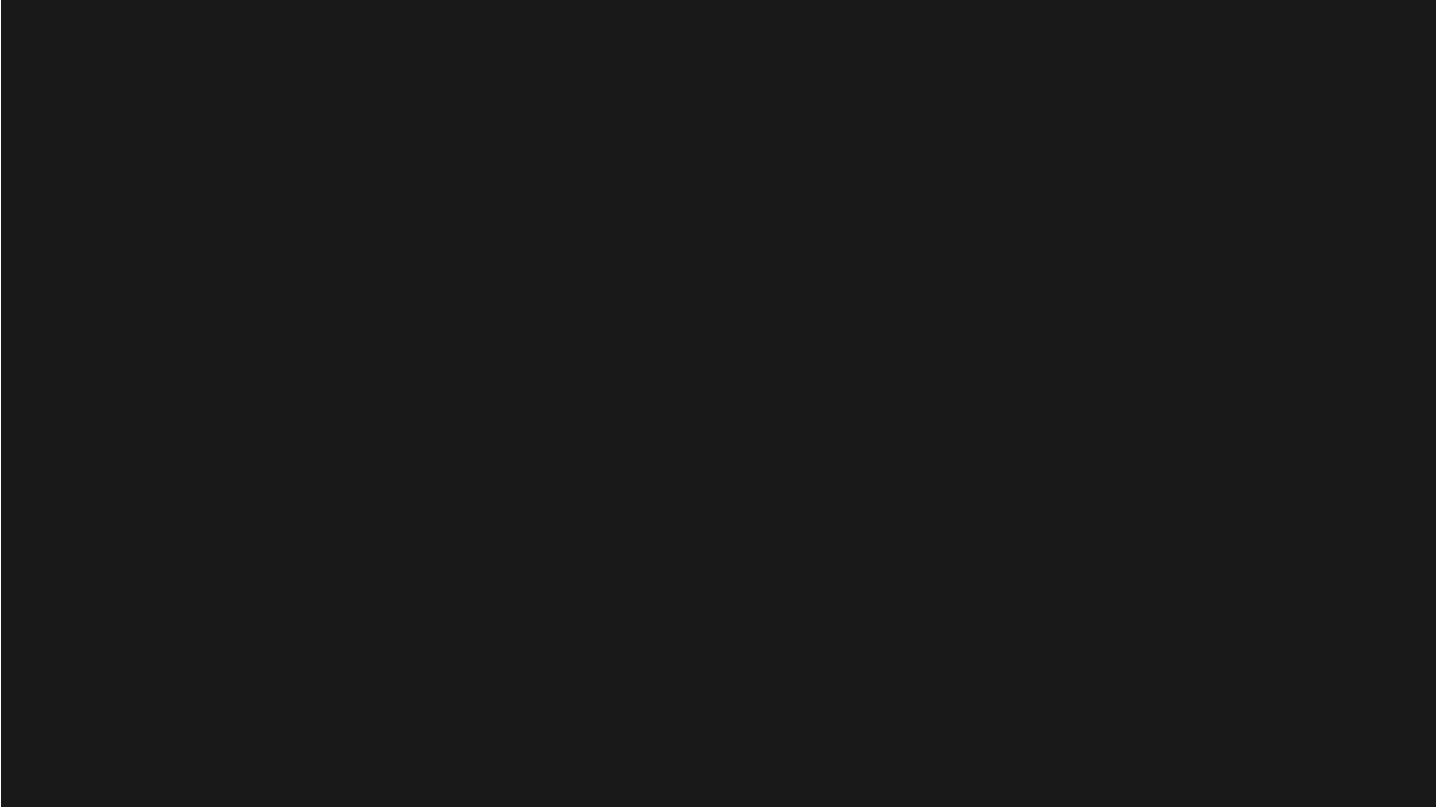
1. Be Patient with the Timing of Justice.

We need patience in any situation where we want our situation to change and it's not changing according to our expectations.

- I'm hungry for dinner. What's mom say? Be patient; it's almost ready.
- I need this paint to dry so I can get on with my project. Be patient; you can't make paint dry any faster.
- I'm dying to know the results of my test score or my interview. Be patient; they will get back with you tomorrow.

Patience is the ability to be content when something you want to change, but in fact, does not change. I'm still hungry. The paint is still wet. I still don't have the information I want. Patience is **CONTENTMENT** with non-change.

That's the first command in the list here:



Now in this passage, James is talking about a certain type of patience. James is talking about patient suffering. When we suffer, of course we want those circumstances to change and we want them to change now. The poor in this passage are being taken advantage of by the rich. They are suffering. The cry of the laborers goes up to the Lord and what does God say, “Be patient.”

God wants them to hope in future deliverance. He wants them to trust that one day, it will be made right. But the timing of that is up to God. Be patient. You must be patient. And that patience might need to last your entire life. It very well could be that you have to be very, very, very patient. It very well could be that the justice you hope for won't come until the last day, the judgment day, the day of slaughter.

It's hard to be patient, especially that patient. It's really hard. We can all be patient for a while. It's socially rude not to be. But after a while, it seems like, “Okay we've crossed a line here. We've crossed over from reasonable to unreasonable.” It's one thing to be on an airplane

and sit on the tarmac for 15 minutes because of a delay. It's another thing entirely to sit on the tarmac for 6 hours. Okay, now I have a right to be upset. This is totally unreasonable. Heads are going to roll.

The goal of today is to get us all to see that all impatience is a very serious spiritual issue. There's a heart sin pretty deep down there. Let me try to show you how this very spiritual issue disguises itself as no big deal..

- If I asked, "Do you think it's reasonable to say you know better than God?"

You have instant answers to those questions. Of course.

If I asked you, "Do you think it's reasonable to become impatient when sitting on the tarmac for four hours?"

I mean, that's understandable. It's pretty normal to be impatient. To be impatient is part of being human.

But you see to be impatient is nothing less than saying, "I know better than God." God, I'm here to complain and let you know that your divine plan for these 6 hours is mistaken.

If Satan can get you to think that being impatient in that moment is no big deal, then he has succeeded in getting you to relocate your trust, to distrust the God of the universe. If he can get you to simply be impatient and not even relate that impatience to a spiritual issue, he has succeeded in ripping Christ off the throne of your heart.

If he can get you to think that a little grumbling or complaining about my situation is no big deal, he's already won before the war even

started because he's tricked you as to where the real battle is taking place.

The war is waged in the small attitudes of the heart, in the seemingly insignificant, invisible throw away moments of the day.

The victory between heaven and hell is determined by the small choices that come from attitudes that happen every day, moment by moment, in the most mundane corners of life.

Maybe you feel pretty good about yourself because you judge your holiness by the number of banks you've robbed, people you've killed, and affairs you've had you might be tempted to feel pretty good. I've not done these things. I'm a pretty good person.

Or maybe you feel bad because you judge your success by how many Bible studies you lead, how many degrees you have, or how large of a business you lead. I don't do these things, so I'm a loser.

But God is informing us the real indicator of godliness is the patience and longsuffering you show in the difficult situations of life you have to endure.

Listen, I just did a funeral last week for Bonnie Wallace who attended our church for several years. And I can't get out of my mind the testimony of the daughters of this family. I asked them to share with me some memories of their mom. Here she was a single mom raising several kids. She had to work 2 and sometimes 3 jobs. She was dirt poor. She had nothing. But in the summer she would come home to feed her kids, put on sunscreen and then go back to work. Over and over again, she would make that sacrifice.

I am quite certain she prayed over and over again, “Lord this is so difficult. Lord this is so hard to raise my kids by myself making minimum wage.” And the Lord said, “Be patient.” There was no stage. There was no lights. There was nobody cheering her on. She just trusted the Lord, did not complain and did what was right. And then she went to be with the Lord.

But man that impacted me. What a mom. I was shattered by that. Do you see?

She lived, her entire life, suffered and died never even knowing how that act of patient suffering impacted me. I didn't even know about it till after her passing. And now here you are benefiting from it. An act of patient obedience, no complaining, in her life, invisible to everyone (or so it seemed) is now glorifying God after her death. The ways of God are mysterious.

The biggest choices in life are the small ones. Heaven and hell is under every bush. It's decisions to sacrifice self, choices to forgive, attitudes to endure and not complain and things like that that are going to determine who you really are and who you will become.

HOW TO BE RIGHTEOUS UNDER OPPRESSION

1. Be Patient with the Timing of Justice.
2. Establish in Your Heart the Coming of the Judge.

As I said, the outline here comes from the three commands given in the text. The first command is to be patient. And the second command gives you resources to obey the first command. How am I supposed to be patient?

Let's look at the second command.



ESTABLISH your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

We are ABLE to be patient because the coming of the Lord is at hand. The Judge who will execute justice, the judge who will deliver the oppressed, is coming. That is the certain, CRITICAL HOPE that transforms your perspective and gives you the ability to suffer well.

The more certain the hope, the more established the point is in your heart, the more patient we can be.

Consider the psychological difference between these two scenarios. Here's the first scenario: Let's say you are in a playing around in a pool and someone comes behind you and without warning, grabs you and forces your head underwater. Who is this? Am I being attacked? How long will this last? You'd be thrashing around. You'd panic. You'd be punching and doing everything in your power to free yourself. Totally understandable. And then after 60 eternal seconds the assailant lets you up and you come thrashing to the surface

gasping for breath, choking, water in your lungs and you discover it was your friend playing a joke on you.

Now compare that to if that same friend said, "Let's see if you can do this. I'm going to hold you underwater for 60 seconds and then let you up. And he gives you a stopwatch. " That one sentence creates a totally different experience. You stayed underwater the exact same amount of time. The difference was you trusted that the suffering has an end. It's just a matter of the clock. Your best bet is to just sit it out, to wait, to expend as little energy as possible.

In the first situation you had no hope or reason to believe it would end so you had to save yourself. In the second situation, because you believed that salvation is coming, your strategy totally changes. My strategy is to wait. To just focus on that IMPENDING salvation moment instead of focusing on the suffering. There's no point in trying to do anything when salvation is right around the corner.

So what I'm really trying to point out here is the connection between our ability to be patient and our HOPE. Our ability to wait patiently is DIRECTLY CONNECTED to our future hope. HOPE makes PATIENT WAITING possible. No hope; no patience. Much Hope; much patience.

Now that connection between PATIENCE and HOPE is found all through our Bibles, both OT and NT. GREAT HOPE; GREAT PATIENCE. I want to give you a blast of verses here. Here's just 7. I literally could have given you 47. It's everywhere in the Bible.

Psalm 62

Psalm 62:5, For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.

Psalm 130

Psalm 130:5, I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in
his word I hope;

Isaiah 8

Isaiah 8:17, I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.

Galatians 5

Galatians 5:5, For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

Romans 8

Romans 8:25, But if we hope for what we do not see,
we wait for it with patience.

GREAT HOPE = GREAT PATIENCE.

God, as a loving father, cares that you suffer. We look up at our heavenly father with puppy dog eyes and say, “God why are you allowing us to suffer?”

That’s the question we want answered. And God gives us some help with that. James 1. Well, trials refine us. the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

But God’s comfort in suffering rarely focuses on the why. God rarely answers the question we are asking, “Why am I suffering.” Instead, God almost always focuses on the who. Look at my eyes. I love you. Look at my eyes. Do you see that I love you. I have a reason. Trust me.

And that is actually the main reason patience honors the Lord.

There is no greater vote of confidence in the wisdom of God, the love of God the character of God than patient suffering.

Because when you suffer patiently, here is what you are saying:

- God is too good to be unkind.
- He's too loving to be uncaring.
- He's too compassionate to be calloused or heartless
- He's far too wise to be mistaken

And so if he asking me to patiently suffer and I cannot understand his reason or trace his hand, then I must trust. I look at his love poured out for me on Calvary and that seals the deal. How could I ever question. If God did not spare his own Son, how will he not along with him give me every needed thing.

That kind of fixed, established hope, honors the Lord and as it turns out, is also what is best for us. "When the time is right, he will act."

Perhaps the situation you are suffering and the patience required to endure it is teaching you something you could not learn any other way. Talk to a 1000 godly men or women who have gone before you and they will all tell you that it was not on the mountaintop that they met the Lord. It was in the valley. As hard as the valley was, they would not trade it for the world. It was not until they learned of the emptiness of everything else that they learned of the fullness of Christ.

Patience is to trust in God's great unseen purposes. When you suffer, you just lay your head on the pillow of God's great love. You just lay your head down and rest in his goodness. You just close your eyes and let him take care of the details. I cannot see but I trust and I'm going to sleep right here. I'm just going to shut my eyes and

rest and release my worry to him. It is not mine to manage.

Sometimes in great trials you have to remind yourself of these big stabilizing truths to help you control your feelings. You have to pull into focus things that at other points in your life were patently obvious but in this moment they are no longer clear and everything feels chaotic. Of course he loves me. I see him there on the cross. Of course he's powerful. He created all things with a word. I will trust him.

Keep the connection between this anchored, established hope and the ability to be patient anchored in your mind.

To further cement that principle, James gives the illustration of the farmer. Consider how HOPE allows a farmer to be patient. Consider the ability to be patient is LINKED to the hope of the farmer.



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.

The farmer prepares a field, sows seed, waters, and then he just sits there. His work is over. And he just waits. His ability to wait is anchored in his ESTABLISHED CONFIDENCE, in his sure and steady hope of the coming rains.

The farmer can do nothing. He has to just wait for the right rain at the right time. In Israel, the way the geography is setup, you are basically just 100% dependent on rain. Rain is everything. The farmers all through the Bible are just absolutely dependent on the rains that came in late autumn and early spring. In the Bible, these rains are called the early and latter rains.

And if you read the OT, every reference to “early and later rains” 100 percent of them are in a context affirming the faithfulness of the Lord (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1).

What we are really hoping in is the character of God. We are really establishing our hearts not in WHAT we know will happen but WHO controls the uncontrollable.

The farmer sees with the eye of faith. He can't see the crops grow. He stares and sees nothing, but he knows the invisible world of cell biology things are happening. Photosynthesis is happening. ATP. DNA strands are uncoiling, copying, proteins are folding, and this plant is growing. All that is way above my paygrade, but I know it's happening. God is sending the rain and a crop is coming.

Why is this suffering happening to me? I have no idea? That's way

above my pay grade. But I know that salvation is coming.

When we trust the who, we can be patient with the how.

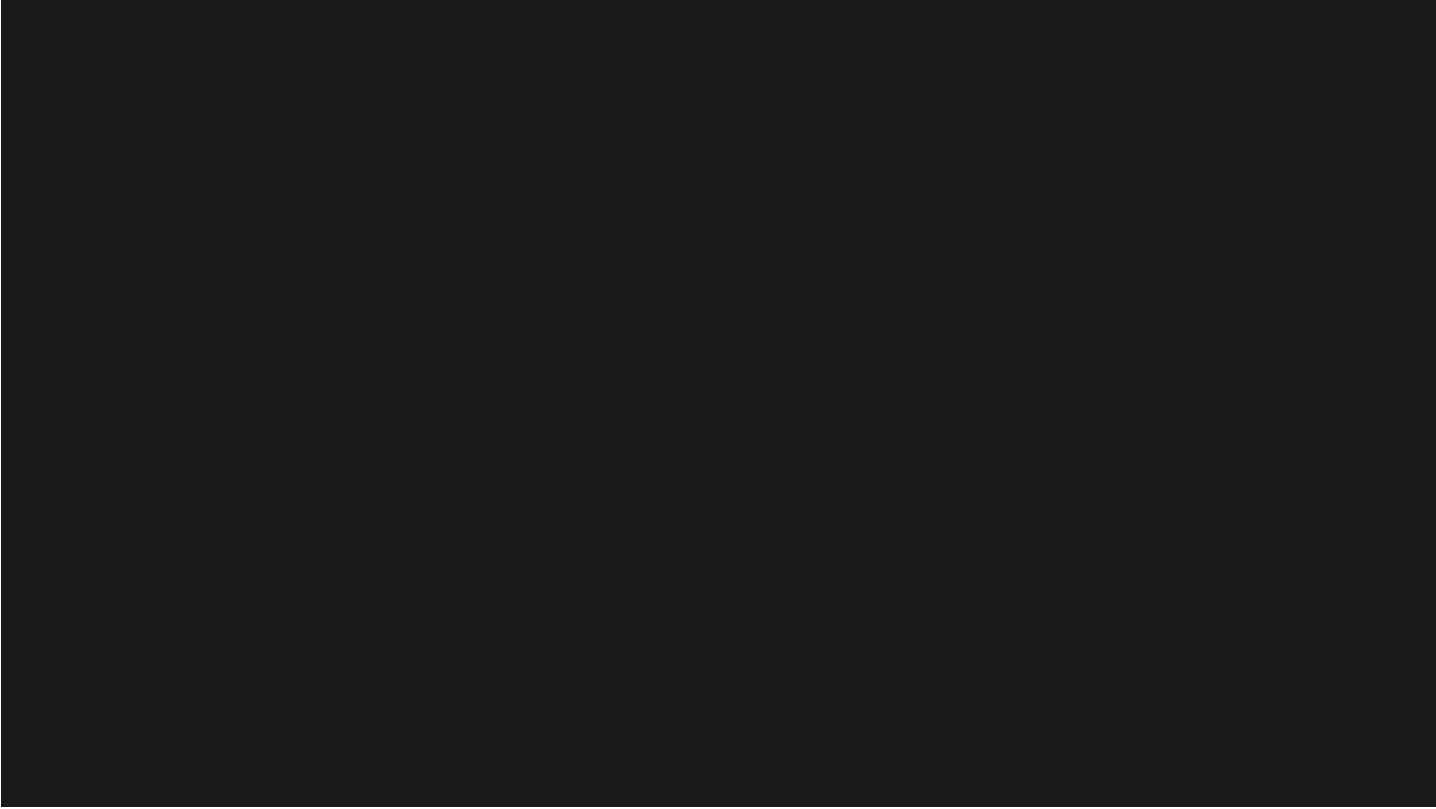
3 commands and three points in our message.

HOW TO BE RIGHTEOUS UNDER OPPRESSION

1. Be Patient with the Timing of Justice.
2. Establish in Your Heart the Coming of the Judge.
3. Do Not Grumble with Your Lips While You Suffer.

Grumbling is just the verbal expression of impatience. You feel impatient and you express that impatience by grumbling.

How do you know when people sitting for four hours are becoming impatient? They begin to grumble. They begin to complain. And James in the text warns us against it.



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

- Grumbling is very easy to do.
- Grumbling is complaining.
- Grumbling can come in the form of making sarcastic comments.
- Grumbling can happen when we cut someone down.
- Grumbling is griping.
- Grumbling is whining or always finding fault.
- Grumbling is nitpicking.
- Grumbling is verbal discontent

James says this is so serious because just like impatience, if Satan can get you to grumble and complain then he's won. He's succeeded in making you believe that the war for heaven and hell takes place on an entirely different front.

Your try to ward off the schemes of the devil fighting by planting churches, doing social reform, political reform, starting schools,

making Christian music and art, and you are so proud; we are so effective. Satan is nowhere to be seen. Satan is just laughing as he walks in the front door.

James is reminding us: the spearhead of the entire battle for holiness happens in your ability to trust God, not complain or grumble.

Grumbling is the seed of something terribly poisonous and toxic. It is so bad that he wants you to see the Judge will judge you for it. Do you remember the children of Israel getting swallowed up in holes in the ground, snakes attacking and biting them all because of some complaining.

It seems so harsh until you step back and you realize the wicked spiritual condition of the complaining heart. Grumbling is just not trusting God. Grumbling is questioning God's authority in your life. Grumbling is your vote that God doesn't know what he's doing and you do.

And you have to agree, that is a pretty evil thing to say.

And he warns that this kind of behavior is at the core of judgment. Setting self above God is at the very heart of the judgment seat of Christ.

So he warns you, don't do it. Don't do it, not because I'm trying to destroy your fun. I'm trying to preserve your joy.

- Remember, God doesn't condemn things because he knows they will make you happy and God is anti-happiness.
- He doesn't condemn things because they are easy and he wants to make your life miserable through hard labor.

- He condemns things that hurt you.

A doctor doesn't forbid a patient from eating of snickers bars because they tastes good. He forbids the eating of snickers because too much sugar undermines health. That's so important. Do you see that?

Grumbling will kill you and everybody around you, eventually. It's like the poison of sugar. It gets into your blood. It gets added like fat to your body.

C.S. Lewis wrote A Preface to Paradise Lost. He says a vote for Satan is a vote for hell, and a vote for hell is a vote for an endless autobiography.

What is hell? Hell is an endless monolog with self. Hell is living in your own head where you get to create reality and never be challenged as to what is good for you. There is nothing more miserable than not being able to get out of your own needs. That is all grumbling is. Hell is endless grumbling. Hell is the endless autobiography, the absolute self-absorption, the absolute concentration on nothing but you, and "Why aren't you doing this for me? Why isn't this happening for me?"

God does not say, "Don't grumble because I want to give you random commands to limit you." He says,

- Grumbling will kill you because grumbling is cutting yourself off from the goodness of God.
- Grumbling is setting yourself up as Lord and master.
- Grumbling is the worship and trust of self over God.
- Grumbling is casting off the authority, care and love of the God of life and all good things.

- If you cut yourself off of the vine by grumbling you will die."

There's nothing more like hell than to be grumbling, always unhappy with the way things are for you.

The way you can melt your heart down and start to become patient and radiant and loving with people who ordinarily would be irritating to you, the way you can do that, is to think about how much you've taxed God's patience. You have to go back. You have to think about it.

One of the great themes of the book of James is repentance. It's much overlooked. James is very harsh but he's not trying to get you to feel shamed. He's not trying to put you in your place. He's not trying to squash you beneath his thumb. He's simply trying to get you to fall at the foot of the cross so you can receive mercy.

You guys we are all a bunch of miserable sinners. I'm not up here telling you all that you are grumpy, impatient sinners as a way to make you feel shame. It is true, we are all bunch of grumpy, impatient sinners. True enough. It's okay to say that. Let's stop denying it. Let's all just cast ourself at the foot of the cross where Jesus died to save us from that evil and receive his grace. Let's cast ourself there to receive his love. Let's fall on our faces with tears streaming down our face saying, "how could you love me so much despite my grumbling, quesitoning, complaining impatient heart."

God you are so good. Thank you for absorbing in my place.

Lord I love you!

Do you see the irony of this thing? You can't exhort yourself into

patience. You can't discipline yourself to be patient. You can't beat yourself into not grumbling. You can't say, "I really should be more patient," and whip and beat yourself.

You can only repent yourself into patience. You have to see who he is. You have to see that he loves you. You have to stare at his love and repent of your arrogance to ever question it. You have to repent and confess that he has always been so slow to anger with you. Until you repent and see how bad you are, you lack the engine for becoming a patient, gentle, evil-absorbing, loving person.

Listen, trust God. He loves you. He cares for you. He is for you. If you are suffering, trust God. He loves you. He has your good in mind. I want to close by reading an extended quote from C.H. Spurgeon. This was so good. This wrecked me this week.

Closing

Believer, if your inheritance be a lowly one you should be satisfied with your earthly portion; for you may rest assured that it is the fittest for you.

Unerring wisdom ordained your lot, and selected for you the safest and best condition.

A ship of large tonnage is to be brought up the river; now, in one part of the stream there is a sandbank; should some one ask, "Why does the captain steer through the deep part of the channel and deviate so much from a straight line?" His answer would be, "Because I should not get my vessel into harbour at all if I did not keep to the deep channel." So, it may be, you would run aground and suffer shipwreck, if your divine Captain did not steer you into the depths of

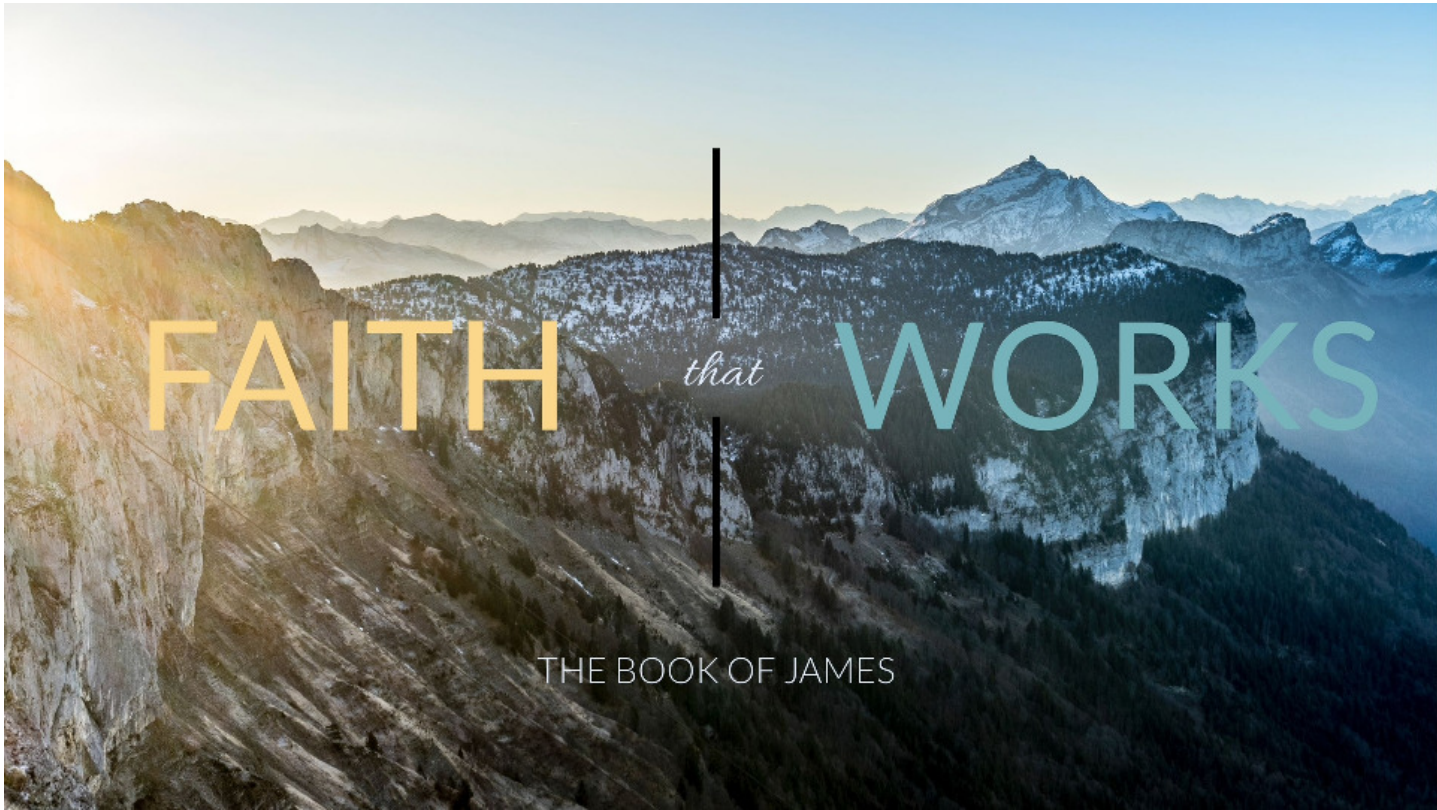
affliction where waves of trouble follow each other in quick succession.

Some plants die if they have too much sunshine. It may be that you are planted where you get but little, you are put there by the loving Husbandman, because only in that situation will you bring forth fruit unto perfection.

Remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, divine love would have put you there. You are placed by God in the most suitable circumstances, and if you had the choosing of your lot, you would soon cry, "Lord, choose my inheritance for me, for by my self-will I am pierced through with many sorrows."

Be content with such things as you have, since the Lord has ordered all things for your good. Take up your own daily cross; it is the burden best suited for your shoulder, and will prove most effective to make you perfect in every good word and work to the glory of God. Down busy self, and proud impatience, it is not for you to choose, but for the Lord of Love!

"Trials must and will befall- But with humble faith to see Love inscribed upon them all; This is happiness to me."



FAITH *that* WORKS

THE BOOK OF JAMES