In our study of James, chapter five this week, James pronounces judgment upon those who hoarded their resources, withheld wages from their workers, lived self-indulgently, and exploited those who lacked the resources the wealthy had placed their trust in. But it's not so much a message of judgment against people of wealth who are wicked and unscrupulous as it is a word of encouragement to those whom they've oppressed. So, James's message to them is, "Be patient."

To the oppressed, James has a message of assurance and encouragement. In spelling out the miseries of the rich that are soon coming upon them for their misuse of their riches, their injustice in failing to pay those they had hired, their exorbitant lifestyles enjoyed at the expense of the poor, and their cruelty towards those of lesser means, James intends to encourage the oppressed to bear their trials with patent perseverance while not envying the rich.

Their encouragement would not only come from the assurance that God will bring certain, terrible judgment on their oppressors, but also from the fact that the Lord is returning soon. To illustrate this, he tells us of the farmer who patiently waits for the rain that will ensure a rich harvest.

As they waited patiently for the Lord's return, there are several, practical attitudes and actions that should characterize their lives. We look at three today and the rest next week. First, we are not to complain about each other, for that's a form of judgment he's previously warned his readers to avoid. Second, we are to take our cue for patient perseverance from the prophets--including Job--who endured much worse treatment than they were experiencing and yet remained patient and faithful to discover how faithful and just God is. Third, we are not to swear--to exaggerate our speech with oaths or curses; instead, our words should be completely transparent and trustworthy--our "yes" should always mean "yes" and our "no" should always mean "no."

This passage draws us back to the words that James began his letter with: "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 steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." We can stand firm and continue living faithfully because the Judge is near--and that Judge is also our merciful Savior." As we wait on the Lord, our confidence in him should shape not only our patient endurance, but also our everyday words and conduct.