

# Patience

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Littlebourne - Sunday 3rd August 2025 - James 5:7-12

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Ecclesiastes 7:8:

*Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

Last week, we saw that James had some hard words for the rich. Having treasures on earth is not the same as treasure in heaven. It's vain to trust in earthly riches, especially if ill-gotten. They won't ultimately serve you.

Now, James turns to the topic of patience. Rather than the get rich quick type thinking of the world, let us be patient.

## v7-8

*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.*

James says 'therefore'. What has been said against the rich, is consolation for the poor and suffering. Those rich in this world are not necessarily rich in eternity, those poor Christians today won't be poor forever.

Take comfort therefore in the fact that Jesus is coming, and that things will change. When Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, as we say in the creed, it will mean justice for God's enemies and deliverance for His people. It will result in the restoration of all things, new heavens and new earth. We can look forward to an eternity with Christ, where

there is no more suffering or poverty.

James tells us to be patient like a farmer. The seeds are sown, but it takes time to see growth. Usually, the initial growth is hidden beneath the surface, and the growth day by day is imperceptible. But with patience, the farmer knows that having sown, he will reap.

Similarly, the coming of Christ is certain. It's 'at hand'. I don't think this is telling us that Jesus is coming tomorrow, but that He *is* coming. His return is certain, and with it, we have the certainty of all that He brings with Him - the new heavens and new earth, justice, glory and restoration. Eternity is secure.

## v9

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

The word here grumble can be more literally translated to groan or sigh. In itself, it's not always a bad thing, but here the qualification is that it's groaning or grumbling against one another.

This doesn't mean avoid all criticism. Sometimes silence is sinful. But it does mean that our complaints and criticism must be done in the right way. Don't let bitterness take hold, don't bear a grudge, as Ephesians 4:31 tells us:

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

Rather, we are to be characterised by forgiveness and grace toward one another. The sort of grumbling and groaning that fosters disunity is in view here. Do we build each other up, whether in agreement or disagreement? Are we patient with each other?

We saw this in chapter 1 (verse 19):

*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;*

Patience requires resisting the urge to jump to conclusions and to grumble.

Our propensity is to appeal to justice when we are wronged, when others grumble against us. Jesus says that by the measure by which you judge others, you will be judged. If we will not forgive others for their faults, will not accept criticism ourselves, will not be gracious to those around us, we can expect the same treatment.

The judgement of God is near - the Judge is standing at the door. We've seen the certainty of Christ's coming, James might also have been thinking of the nearness of judgement to all of us, because we will all stand before God after our physical death. We might go to meet our maker any day, and we should be prepared as we don't know when it may be. Judgement is always near.

## v10-11

*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.*

The example James calls us to are 'the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord' - he leaves no doubt as to their status as true believers, as people chosen by God. The first way to take heart from their example is that suffering or requirement for patience does not mean God doesn't love us or that we aren't saved. Other Christians have been through worse, and God loved them.

Rather, the blessing of God given to His people is one of steadfastness. The best blessing God can give us is a continuing dependence on Him, being kept in His grace. Mark 8:36:

*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*

The specific example given is Job. We hopefully all know the story of Job, how he suffered like no other. He lost everything, but kept the right attitude. Job 1:20-22:

*20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."*

*22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*

Of course, in the rest of the book of Job we see plenty of groaning at suffering - Job wasn't all stoic about it. But the patience required is to trust God. What Job is commended for is that he didn't reject God in the midst of what happened. He was steadfast in that regard.

We see at the end of the book of Job, that in the end, it worked out for good and God was compassionate and merciful to him. Job ends up materially better off than he started. God had purposes in what happened to Job, not least that we be given his example.

God has purposes in all suffering - it's maybe cold comfort sometimes to think that, and it can be hard to understand what such purposes often are, but scripture does tell us that God uses suffering for great good. We can look forward to that day when Christ returns and all suffering is dealt with finally.

## v12

*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.*

Patience shapes not just our attitudes to material things, and our waiting. Patience also shapes our words.

James here is paraphrasing some of the sermon on the mount. Jesus says, in Matthew 5:33-37:

*33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.*

What's being said here? I don't think the point is to do away with all vows and promises - Jesus's command is to not swear falsely, but to perform what we have sworn.

There's also here the idea of not swearing in this indirect way. Swearing on God directly is a dangerous game, but maybe we would swear on other things in place of God. But it's not more lawful to swear by heaven or earth instead of openly by God, for Jesus says that God's glory is found in these things - the earth is His footstool and heaven his throne. All oaths invoke God's authority. In whatever we swear on, we're ultimately swearing before God, and He holds us to account for our oaths.

The key then is to swear only when we ought and to mean it. When we make marriage vows, we should mean them, and be held to them. When we agree to do something, we should do what we agreed to. It's a common sin in all ages to promise lightly, and to not keep one's word. Christians should be those whose word is trustworthy.

When we make vows we don't intend to keep, we're implicitly being present oriented, rather than future oriented. We want the benefits of the oath now, and the consequences of failing to uphold it are less real. When we vow rightly, we bind our future selves, and if we're really thinking about it, we are thinking about the future, and the future benefits. This too is a matter of patience - have we the patience to make promises we keep?

## **Conclusion**

The overall thrust of this passage is to be patient.

We are to be patient with our attitude to earthly things - we know this world will pass away, that in eternity the material riches we have gained will be of no worth. Now that doesn't mean that we should seek out poverty, or renounce all worldly wealth, quite the opposite. But we should have an attitude towards earthly riches that puts them in their right place, and an attitude of patience.

We should be patient with each other, not holding grudges or grumbling, but being gracious towards others.

We should be patient in all circumstances, following the examples of those that were patient in the face of much worse than we experience.

We should be patient in what we say - not rashly blurting out ill-thought promises, nor saying things for just short term gain, but being truthful.

And James gives us reasons for all this patience:

First, we will be judged. God judges what we do and say. Our attitudes toward earthly things, towards each other, towards God, are a basis for judgement. And this judgement is near - the Judge is standing at the door.

Secondly, because we know what is coming. Christ will return again, and eternity will be spent with Him. What we are going through now, what seems important now, will not last. In light of eternity, we should be patient with things on earth. God has purposes for what happens here, and in the end we will see how God's purposes unfold. Our patience is to be rooted in hope.

James says in verse 8 to stand firm or more literally translated, to establish our hearts - we are to be firm and established because we have the hope of Christ's coming.

Peter puts it well, 1 Peter 1:3-9:

*3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Finally, practically, are we reminding ourselves of this hope? When we feel impatient, when we feel like grumbling, when earthly things are not going our way, do we remind ourselves of the hope we have? Do we fuel our patience with the steadfast promises of God?