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Patience in Suffering

James 5:7-12

I. The Need for Patience: Waiting for Salvation

James 5:7 “Therefore, be patient, brothers...”

A. What is Patience?

1. James uses a powerful word here... *makrothumeo*... LONG-SUFFERING
2. Like the endurance of a marathon runner... not a lightning quick reflexes of the sprinter... a LONG TIME in the race
3. Earlier, in James 1, he speaks of the endurance of the Christian life as well... there he uses a different word, *hupomone*...

One scholar has said, *makrothumia* “long-suffering” has to do with patiently enduring difficult people and *hupomone* (“endurance”) has to do with patiently enduring difficult circumstances

4. In any case, patient suffering is ESSENTIAL to our salvation, to our time here in this world

B. The Context in James

1. A people enduring powerful trials
2. James has just gotten done discussing the fiery judgment awaiting rich oppressors... he speaks prophetic words of eternal condemnation for these people

James 5:1-3 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ² Your wealth has rotted, and

moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.

3. He then turns his attention toward his brother and sisters in Christ:

James 5:7 Therefore, be patient, brothers, until the coming of the Lord

4. The suffering they are enduring at the hands of these rich oppressors will not go on forever

5. It also fits the initial message James gives of patient endurance of trials at the beginning of this book

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

6. James again points Christians to the need for PATIENCE in suffering, for the patient endurance that is essential to our salvation

C. Our Context: We Are a Very Impatient People

1. We American Christians generally do not suffer the kinds of economic oppression James 5:1-6 addresses... beaten, oppressed and murdered by rich overlords
2. We also do not face the kinds of persecution our Christian brothers and sisters are undergoing in North Korea or China or Iran, or even India
3. In those nations, our brothers and sisters are arrested, beaten, imprisoned, even tortured and killed for their Christian faith
4. Our sufferings do not amount to that level... but still we are called on to perseverance in the Christian life
5. And we are a very impatient people
 - a. Our technology has made us expect immediate results
 - b. We are used to instant answers from the internet by our hand-held devices

- c. We are used to next-day delivery and fast food and GPS systems that tell us how to avoid the traffic snarls and make it home in the shortest amount of time possible
 - d. We are generally not farmers, whom James will use as examples of patience, who are used to waiting and waiting and waiting
 - e. I myself have found myself getting impatient at a drive-thru at a fast-food restaurant in which I placed my order and then sat there not moving for over five minutes. FIVE MINUTES!
 - f. I have found myself impatient over a program that takes an extra 45 seconds to load on my laptop, while the blue donut goes round and round
6. But James 5:7-12 speaks a strong word to us, as do many other scriptures, of the need for patient endurance in the Christian life

D. The Scope of our Waiting

- 1. James says

James 5:7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

- 2. We'll talk more about this in a moment, but this is definitely speaking of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to planet Earth, ending all of human history
- 3. For two thousand years, the church has been waiting for this, the next major event planned and prophesied in the order of Redemptive History by Almighty God
- 4. For two thousand years, we have been hearing that Christ is coming SOON... in fact, he says it THREE TIMES in the final chapter of the final book of the Bible...

Revelation 22:7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

5. James is calling for LONG-TERM, BIG-PICTURE waiting... waiting for it all to end
6. For those suffering daily under the oppression of these rich tyrants, it's day after day out in the hot fields, harvesting for the wicked who are oppressing them, and waiting and waiting for the coming of the Lord

E. The Purpose of the Waiting: Salvation

2 Peter 3:15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation

1. The purpose of the delay is SALVATION
2. God has a timetable, a purpose for all of history, and that ultimate purpose is his own glory in the final salvation of all the elect, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world
3. So, he means at least the redemption of the elect who have as yet not come to Christ

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

4. aa
5. God has not yet brought history to an end because there are still some elect, chosen in Christ before the creation of the world, who have not yet come to repentance
6. But not only that... our own salvation is being worked out gradually

Philippians 2:12-13 continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

F. Our Salvation Comes in Stages

1. Justification
2. Sanctification
3. Glorification

G. And our Suffering is Part of God's Wise Plan for our own growth into Christlike maturity

James 1:3-4 you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

H. God Has a Timing for Everything...

1. God knows the value of time

2 Peter 3:8 With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

- a. The 2000 years since Christ are like NOTHING AT ALL to our eternal God... so Christ can rightly say "I am coming SOON" and not come for 20 centuries after that!
- b. But notice also, God works intensively and extremely actively EVERY SINGLE DAY on his people... one single day is like 1000 years to God
- c. And God has measured out how long it will be for each of us

2. Christ came at just the right time

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

3. So your life will end at just the right time
4. the unfolding of your personal history is for your own final salvation

5. God has carefully measured out the sufferings and trials you need to complete your own salvation journey and be fitted for heaven

Psalm 139:16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

- I. So... God is Calling on us to have PATIENT ENDURANCE of the suffering of the Christian life... because our sufferings are essential to the salvation of our souls and the souls of all the elect

II. The Scope and Hope of Patience: The Second Coming of Christ

A. The Scope of Patience: The Coming of the Lord

James 5:7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

1. History will come to an end at the Second Coming of Christ
2. All the suffering of all the elect will end forever when this present world ends

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

3. As we've already noted, this history has been unfolding for two thousand years... every generation of Christian has had these words emblazoned in their hearts: "Behold, I am coming SOON!"
4. Some Christians have suffered for a long time in prison, and then were executed for their faith
5. Others have undergone oppression at the hands of anti-Christian governments and powerful religious leaders
6. Their sufferings have been great... but Paul still calls those sufferings light and momentary

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Romans 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

B. The Hope of Our Patience

1. The second coming of Christ is our great HOPE
2. Hope is a powerful feeling in the heart that the future is BRIGHT based on the promises of God
3. We are going to a perfect world, free from all death, mourning, crying and pain...
 - a. A world free from all evildoers
 - b. A world free from Satan and his demons
 - c. A world free from the decay and corruption and death that Adam's sin brought on nature... a world free from thorns and thistles and decay and vanity
 - d. A world radiantly bright with the glory of God... shining everywhere with the glory of God in Christ... a world that does not need the light of the sun or moon or lamp to shine on it
4. So, when Paul says that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with that glory, we should be FILLED with hope
5. When Paul says that they are LIGHT and MOMENTARY, we should be buoyed up with hope; Paul suffered intensely for Christ, and he was the one who said these words

C. This Coming of the Lord is ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN

1. Christ has promised it... there is no doubt about it
2. Over 500 times in the New Testament, the Second Coming of Christ is mentioned and described

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

Matthew 24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the

Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

3. This certain promise should fill each of us with a radiant, buoyant hope, no matter what suffering we are enduring right now

D. Paul Says Christ is NEAR!!

James 5:9 The Judge is standing at the door!

So the rich oppressors will be crushed by the Lord's Coming... and he's standing right at the door. It won't be long!

For our brothers and sisters in North Korean prisons, eating filthy and inadequate food and drinking filthy polluted water and being tortured mentally and physically for their faith... the Judge of all the earth is standing at the door!

And for us who are enduring far less dramatic trials, but we are still suffering... maybe medical miseries, chronic pain, opposition from non-Christian co-workers, etc. loneliness after a godly spouse has died... we can derive the same hope – the end is near, and the future is gloriously bright!

III. The Examples of Patience: Farmers, Prophets, and Job

A. The Farmer's Patience

James 5:7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

1. Most of us have never been vocational farmers, whose entire lives depended on the harvest coming in
2. Farmers learn to be patient and look up to heaven for something they cannot control

3. They need the rain; without it, their crops will fail
4. James mentions the early and latter rains... a feature of the climate in Palestine
 - a. The early rain came just after the seeds were planted in October and November... giving the new seedlings the life-giving water necessary for their survival
 - b. The latter rains came just before harvest time in March/April, completing the growing season with a flourish
 - c. Without either of those rains, the crops would fail to produce abundantly
5. The picture of patience, of dependence, of expectancy and LOOKING UPWARD to the Lord is powerful
6. Salvation is often likened to the growing of a plant from a seed
 - a. The parable of the seed and the soils; the parable of the mustard seed; the parable of the wheat and the weeds
 - b. Especially this one:

Mark 4:26-29 "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

- c. Our salvation is like that... so is the advance of the Kingdom of Christ
- d. We cannot make the seed grow... we plant, others water, God gives the growth
- e. So the salvation of sinners all over the world happens only by the hidden power of God
- f. Farmers waiting for a rain they need but cannot control is a powerful picture of Christians waiting on God for salvation...

their own growth in holiness, and the repentance and faith of the unconverted... God alone can give the growth

g. But we do our work; we work and we wait...

7. Patience is a STRENGTHENING of the soul

James 5:8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near.

a. This is a powerful image... another translation says "Establish your hearts"... like building a structural member in your heart so it doesn't crumble under the weight of suffering

b. To be patient, you must strengthen your own hearts; to be impatient is a picture of weakness, of instability

James 1:6-8 he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

c. This strengthening of the heart is usually the secret work of the Holy Spirit within us

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

Psalm 23:2-3 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul.

d. But here, through waiting on the Lord actively, we are strengthening our own hearts IN HIM

Isaiah 40:28-31 The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint

So, like the farmer waiting for rain, so we must renew our souls in long-suffering by waiting actively on the Lord

B. Example #2: The Prophets

James 5:10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

1. James also points to the well-known and tragic history of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord
2. Universally, these prophets suffered greatly... great opposition from those they were trying to bless as they spoke the word of the Lord
3. As Stephen put it so powerfully

Acts 7:52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?

4. And Jesus as well

Matthew 23:29-31 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰ And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

5. Elijah was persecuted viciously by evil King Ahab and his demonic wife Jezebel
6. Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah
7. Jeremiah was almost universally hated and opposed by all his generation... perhaps the most hated of all the prophets!
8. John the Baptist preached against King Herod's unlawful marriage to his brother's wife; so Herod imprisoned him and eventually beheaded him
9. This is the history of the prophets... immense suffering in the name of the Lord
10. But they persevered in their ministry and God rewarded them in heaven

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

11. In our sufferings for the name of Christ, we should desire to take up the fallen mantle of Elijah the prophet and walk in it, speaking the truth of the gospel to our present generation, no matter how they respond

C. Example #3: Job

James 5:11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

1. Other than Jesus Christ and Paul, no one else in the Bible suffered as much as Job
 - a. In a single day, in wave upon wave of horrifying news, Job lost all his possessions and all his ten children
 - b. Then in a second attack from Satan, Job lost his health and was in physical agony... there was nothing left on earth of any pleasure or blessing
2. It's a bit strange that James mentions him as an example of patient endurance, because so many of Job's words are bitter laments against what God has done

Job 3:11 "May the day of my birth be CURSED! Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?"

Job 19:6-7 God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. ⁷ "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.

3. It is for this very reason that God rebukes Job

Job 38:1-4 Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: ² "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and

you shall answer me. ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?

4. It is also because of this that Job repents

Job 42:3, 6 Surely I spoke of things I did not understand... Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes

5. BUT Job's faith in God never wavered despite the overwhelming trials God brought upon him

Job 13:15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him

Job 19:26 And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God

6. Therefore God in the end vindicated Job and restored all his possessions to him; more on this in a moment

IV. The Holiness of Patience: Free from Grumbling and Swearing

A. It Matters a Great Deal HOW We Go Through the Trials

1. God wants us to control our mouths when we are in times of trial

a. The Israelites were continually GRUMBLING against the Lord and speaking hard words against him

Exodus 14:11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?"

b. God hated their grumbling; at one point after they refused to enter the Promised Land, they grumbled about the manna

Numbers 11:4-6 The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost-- also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

c. It is very easy for us as sinners to charge God with wrongdoing and to grumble against him

2. God also wants us not to grumble against each other

James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

- a. When people are suffering and struggling, they can often take it out on innocent bystanders...
- b. You are in chronic pain, or you are being oppressed by a rich tyrant, or you lost your job because you are a Christian... and you end up chewing your spouse out, or getting in a conflict with your pastor or a fellow church member
- c. James FORBIDS this... the community of the faith needs to walk by faith; the Judge is standing at the door, not just to judge rich oppressors but to judge faithless grumblers and complainers
- d. We should realize at every moment, the imminent coming of the Lord means that he hears everything we are saying to each other, even behind closed doors

Matthew 12:36-37 men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷ For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

B. Do Not Swear

James 5:12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear-- not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

1. This is one of those odd moments in the Book of James, where it's hard to see how this verse fits into the flow of the argument
2. It doesn't really seem to fit with what precedes it... patient endurance of trials
3. And it doesn't really seem to fit what follows it either... a life of faith-filled prayer
4. So I am linking it with the holiness with which Christ wants us to walk, even in times of trial
5. This is taken right from the Sermon on the Mount...

Matthew 5:33-37 you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; 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 swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

6. The issue is the blameless HONESTY with which we must speak
7. People take vows and swear oaths because they are essentially liars; they have to swear on a stack of Bibles because their “Yes” does not mean “Yes” and their “No” does not mean “No”
8. But James is commanding people to speak the truth from their hearts

V. The Outcome of Patience: A Rich Harvest

A. So What is the Outcome of the Patient Endurance Christ Wants?

James 5:11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

1. God is so compassionate and merciful! His design is not to crush us but to strengthen us and make us fruitful... with an ETERNAL harvest for heaven
2. Job's physical restoration is a visible symbol of the heavenly rewards and harvest a life of patient endurance will bring about

Job 42:12-17 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. ¹³ And he also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. ¹⁵ Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶ After this, Job lived a hundred and forty

years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. ¹⁷ And so he died, old and full of years.

The blessings we are pursuing are like this... only eternal, in heaven!

B. We've Already Seen in James 1 that Patient Endurance in Trials Results in Spiritual Maturity... Conformity to Christ

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

C. This is Exactly the Same Teaching in Hebrews

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

D. So also when it comes to evangelism and missions... the heavenly rewards for those who are willing to suffer and patiently endure are eternally glorious!