

The Second Coming

James 5:7-12

Let me remind you where we began last week, from the first six verses of this chapter in James.

James 5:1 “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.”

The miseries of those who love their riches will not only be the loss of those riches, but also of their own eternal judgment.

Heb. 9:27 “...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”

That’s the context for this great encouragement and exhortation of verse 7, “Therefore be patient, brethren.” And with we begin this morning with that exhortation. In fact, James has a series of four exhortations in these few verses.

I. THE EXHORTATIONS.

These are the four: be patient. Strengthen or establish your hearts, in verse 8. Verse 9, don’t grumble. And verse 12, don’t swear. This whole book of James is replete with exhortations, as the inspired writer of Scripture seeks to apply the truths of the gospel to the hearts and lives of his readers. Applications. Practical ways in which the truth of the Bible comes to bear upon your lives. Grammatically, we could speak of the imperative mood. Imperatives are commands, obligations to perform the duties of obedience.

It amazes me that many Christians today believe that such exhortations and applications are inappropriate in preaching, or that they somehow contradict the truths of the gospel of grace. There is, perhaps, good reason for that lack of emphasis in giving

application when you consider the so-called gospel message of the liberal church, which is essentially reduced to exhortations of moral instruction. “Be good. Do good. Live a good Christian life. Follow the golden rule.” Etc. Nothing more, just simplistic, moralistic, humanistic encouragements to live better lives. Things that amount to nothing other than new year’s resolutions.

Apart from the gospel message, those applications are meaningless. They are empty and even hopeless, for there is no redemption in them. It does no good to tell a man who is dead in his sins to “live a good Christian life.” He can’t. It is like telling a corpse to enjoy dinner! It simply can’t be done. There has to be the promise of the gospel, the redemption for sinners that is accomplished by the finished work of Jesus Christ.

But to those who are redeemed, as to those whom James writes, there are many applications given in Scriptures as imperatives. Exhortations. And so, beloved, I exhort you,

A. Be patient.

v.7 “Be patient.

v.8 “You also, be patient.”

The Greek word means “longsuffering.” It means to bear with patient endurance whatever circumstances you might encounter in life. Even when provoked, there is self-restraint and a complete unwillingness to retaliate. It means to be slow to anger, slow to punish, even in bearing the offenses and injuries of others.

This is a very significant and prominent Christian virtue. And so we read that,

1 Cor. 13:4 “Love is patient.” Or, “Love suffers long.”

We read that,
Gal. 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience...”

Again, the NKJV well translates it “longsuffering.” This patience comes to define the essence of our Christian calling.

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

And similarly,
Col. 3:12 “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

So patience means to bear with one another. And to bear with the circumstances of life! To be longsuffering. Thus simply by reading the inspired words of James, I exhort you this morning, “Be patient.” And, verse 8, “establish your hearts.”

B. Strengthen your hearts.

That’s written as an imperative for you to obey. It is revealed by God in the form of an obligation laid upon you. “Strengthen your hearts.” This word means to make stable, make firm and secure.

There are verses in the Bible that explicitly state that this is God’s work, that he will strengthen your heart. For example,
1 Peter 5:10 “But may the God of all grace, who called us to

His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

But there is no contradiction. God will strengthen and establish you. And he calls you to strengthen yourself. Paul joins those two ideas together in,

Phil. 2:12 “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

So beloved, this is the great goal of the ministry of the church. This is the great goal of my preaching and teaching ministry, that you hear and heed this exhortation to strengthen yourselves. It is the call to Christian stability, Christian maturity. Then, thirdly, the third exhortation which might catch you by surprise but actually fits so perfectly into this context,

C. Don’t grumble.

This is a fundamental, foundational aspect of our endurance and stability in life, the willingness and commitment not to grumble. Literally the word means to groan.

v.9

Phil. 2:14 “Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.”

And the fourth exhortation,

D. Don’t swear.

v.12

There is more in that verse than I could effectively cover in this sermon today, so we will look at that verse alone next week. I include it now merely by reference, one of the four related and connected applications of the gospel bearing upon our lives as those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ. As a help to us in understanding these exhortations, particularly the chief one of patience, James includes three illustrations.

II. THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

First,

A. The farmer.

v.7

The farmer is such a obvious and effective illustration, even in this day and age when farming is so less common than in the days of the New Testament writing, the obviousness is the point. The farmer sows and then he waits for the harvest. He sows the seed, and then he waits for the rain to come! Keep in mind, this was before the days of irrigation. He didn't turn on the sprinklers. He had done all that he could do. Now he would simply wait.

He would wait for the early rains, the autumn rains "in the latter part of October. Then he can plant his seed so that germination takes place. And he eagerly hopes for a sufficient amount of rainfall in April and May when the grain is maturing and the yield increases every time the rains come down."

The point is that the farmer waits for something that is yet future. His well-being and actually his whole life is dependent upon something that is yet to come. That's the meaning of endurance. And the hard part of that for us is that we live in such an age of instant everything. The idea of waiting for something that is not available now is rejected outright. We want what we want now.

There is a reason why so few people learn the patience of longsuffering, which is simply that they have never had occasion to wait. Desires are gratified immediately. Needs are satisfied as soon as they are felt. And the impulsive, impetuous actions of those who simply refuse to wait for anything betray a heart that is anything but strong and stable! Those without patience will very much be given to grumbling, and more than likely to swearing--making quick and rash promises and oaths.

This is where the stability of life will come from, the strength of patience. It will come from the ability to view life as a farmer views his harvest. So remember, beloved, this is for you, for your encouragement. You are to look upon the farmer waiting for the harvest and see in him a pattern for your whole life. Then look at,

B. The prophets.

Those men who "spoke in the name of the Lord." Here suffering is tied in directly with patience.

v.10-11a

Indeed they are blessed, they who were steadfast, translated patience in the New King James. Its meaning is even more precisely, endurance. Not so much the idea of longsuffering here, but rather the resulting perseverance. The ESV translation is very good here, "who remained steadfast."

They didn't give up! When trouble arose, they didn't quit! When the circumstances of life brought trials, they didn't succumb to despondency or despair. They maintained their hope of what was yet to come. They did not surrender to their circumstances, their hearts were not governed and controlled by their circumstances.

So here the emphasis is upon that hope as contrasted with

despair. Blessed are they who persevere under trial. Isn't that what this whole letter is about?

James 1:2 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing....12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Let me give you just one example, one prophet who persevered. I think he's my favorite of all the prophets, Habakkuk. Habakkuk had a great problem.

Hab. 1:2 "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save? 3 Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. 4 So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted."

God answered that he would send the Babylonians to bring justice to Israel. And then the question for God was, "How can you use such a wicked nation to judge your own people." The book ends with Habakkuk's great hope and confidence of endurance. This was his faith in this midst of those trials,

Hab. 3:17 "Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls— 18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19 The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills."

Beloved, look to those prophets, for the encouragement of your faith. How blessed they were, for their steadfast endurance in the face of trials. And doesn't Jesus also declare the encouragement to us that the blessing that came to those persecuted prophets will also come to us?

Mat. 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Then, the example of,

C. Job.

v.11 "You have heard of the perseverance of Job."

"You have heard of the steadfastness of Job." "You have heard of the patience of Job." Let me remind you. When his afflictions had come, the loss of his worldly wealth, the loss of his children's lives, and the loss of his own health and strength, this is what we read,

Job 1:20 "Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." 22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong."

Job is an interesting example, because on the one hand, we tend to dismiss his case as simply too extreme. We could never be like that. Yet, on the other hand, his faith and his patience were far from perfect, and much of the book of Job details his failures of patience. He did complain, and cursed the very day he

was born. So Calvin concludes his evaluation of Job, “Though he sometimes failed through the infirmity of the flesh, or murmured within himself, yet he ever surrendered himself to God, and was ever willing to be restrained and ruled by him. Though, then, his patience was somewhat deficient, it is yet deservedly commended.”

And clearly, he was rewarded for his steadfastness.

Job 42:10 “And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before...12 And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning...16 And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons’ sons, four generations. 17 And Job died, an old man, and full of days.”

Therefore, beloved, look to Job. You who see clearly the troubles of your life, look to the endurance of this man that you might not lose hope yourself! Now, let me put all of this into context.

III. THE CONTEXT.

And this context is absolutely crucial, for this context is what provides the motivational perspective that makes all this possible. You see, the exhortation is not simply, “Be patient.” Rather it is, v.7 “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.”

The exhortation is not simply, “Establish your hearts,” but more fully,

v.8 “Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

The exhortation is not simply, “Do not grumble.” We read in, v.9 “Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that

you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

Each of those exhortation is given in the context of,

A. The second coming of the Lord.

Be patient in the midst of the struggles of this age, be steadfast in your endurance, why? Because Jesus is coming back. “Be patient” does not mean merely, grin and bear it. Not the Stoic sense of “take it on the chin.” Not the modern military sense of the duty of a soldier’s performance, soldiering on despite the obstacles. It is so much more than that. And certainly much, much more than the hopeless and despairing surrendering to the fatalistic predetermination of simply, “What will be will be.”

There is nothing hopeless or despairing in this context at all. Just the opposite. This is your great hope, that no matter what you might experience in this age, no matter what you might have to endure,

Rom. 8:18 “...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Paul continues in that passage,

Rom. 8:19 “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still

hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

With great hope, we wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ! Peter has the same message,

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.”

1 Peter 1:13 “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

That’s the context, the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus. That’s what makes these exhortations meaningful and actually encouraging. Jesus will return. That promise from God is what gives you the strength to heed these exhortations. This is how God will enable you to remain steadfast. By apprehending the promise of the gospel, that God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” as I just read from 1 Peter 1.

God has promised. That is your hope. God is faithful, and that is your protection against despair. And God is also good, good in the exercise of his mercy.

B. The sovereign mercy of the Lord.

Let me go back to Job for just a moment.

v.11

Here is what ties all this together, with a reference to God’s own sovereign and eternal purpose. This is where you hope really grows deeply into your soul. This is when patience and endurance really become possible. When you see that “the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

God is not fate, for fate is not compassionate. And beloved, God is not Allah, nor is Allah God, for Allah is not compassionate and merciful.

God is sovereign, that is, every single circumstance of our lives comes about “according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” But in the exercise of that sovereignty, in the exercise of his own eternal decree, God is compassionate and merciful.

God is good. And kind, compassionately loving his people as a father loves his children. God is merciful to his children in the loving goodness. And that’s what you really ought to see in Job! That’s what you really ought to see in this whole text of James 5, and, in fact, in the whole book of James. This is where the internal, spiritual strength to persevere comes from, from the revelation of God’s own glory in his lovingkindness shown to men.

So beloved, be patient. As you endure whatever troubles that God in his eternal counsel had determined for your life, look forward with eager anticipation for Jesus to return. And with that hope, always be sure and confident that,

Ps. 103:8 “The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. 9 He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

v.7 “Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.”