

THE POWER OF PATIENCE

James 5:7-11

INTRODUCTION

How do you respond to a difficult situation? How do you respond to difficult people?

Joshua 1:6-7 was a command from God to draw the hearts and minds of his people back to the sufficient word that He had been giving them.

Psalms 55: 16-23 the same message from David – God fights our battles and carries our burdens.

READ James 5: 7-11 – same reminder from James – he now turns his attention away from the persecutors to the persecuted – to comforting and encouraging the believers

Proposition: 3 Virtues in the Form of a Command:

- I. Be Patient
- II. Be Thankful
- III. Be Steadfast

1st Virtue ...

I. Be Patient 5:7-8

Point – longsuffering with people, forgiving, tolerant, selfless – to follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – no one has shown more patience and longsuffering

Proof – **James 5:7-8** – “**Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.**”

“**therefore**” links this section of counsel and encouragement to James’ afflicted brethren with the previous section of fiery denunciation of the oppressive rich.

- James shifts his focus from the persecutors to the persecuted, moving from condemning the faithless, abusive rich to comforting the faithful, abused poor.

“**brethren**” used 4 times

- at the beginning of each section – gives us context and gives us our outline

In these two verses, James:

- A. makes his **point**
- B. gives a **picture**
- C. gives a **promise**

A. James makes his **point**

5:7 – “**be patient**” –in Greek grammar – aorist imperative

- urgent duty as afflicted “**brethren**”
- **patience** is used three times in these 2 verses, a fourth time in **v. 10**
- the word translated as patience literally means – “long-tempered”

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, we read in our English language “slow to anger”

Prov 19:11 – “**A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.**”

Prov 14:29 – “**He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.**”

B. James gives a **Picture**

5:7b - “**Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.**”

The early rains fall in Oct/Nov – soften the hard-baked soil for plowing and sowing and watering the seeds to sprout

The late rains fall in April/May – mature the crops in preparation for harvest

Point of this farmer illustration:

- the farmer knows there is an interval of growth and development before the “precious produce” and he eagerly looks forward to the harvest and → He is **Patient**
- he doesn’t get impatient after a couple of weeks and go checking on the seeds by digging them up
- he trusts his experience and the faithful, godly farmer knows that God has promised that future harvest

In the same way, what God is telling us, through James, is that just as the farmer is patient with his fields, we are to do the very same thing...

5:8 – “You too be patient; strengthen your hearts”

“You too be patient” – like the farmer, be patient

“strengthen your hearts” – this is the harvest

- Strengthening the spiritual muscle of the heart
- so you will be firm and immovable – not in our dealings with each other but in Christ – trusting in God
- instead of feeling agitated and shaken up by your experiences of trouble - instead of answering with unrighteous anger - we are able to respond in a right way to the situation or the person
- maintain an inner sense of stability
- be iron-hearted – not iron as in a hard heart that hasn’t received God but iron that is strong and steadfast – trusting in God

This can only be done by lifting our eyes heavenward

C. James gives a **Promise**

5:7b – “**until the coming of the Lord.**”

5:8b – “**for the coming of the Lord is at hand**”

The language James uses here is the language they would use to describe a picture of royalty visiting a town or village

- frequent usage for the return of Christ
- the certain return of the King should have a sanctifying impact on daily life
- when we meditate on that – on the absolute certain understanding we have that Jesus rose from the grave, He is reigning right now at the right hand of God, and He is returning to receive His own to Himself and He will establish His Kingdom here on earth

“**is at hand**” – the return of Christ is always close at hand

- it could happen at any moment → **Imminence**
- there is nothing that needs to occur before His return

There is a strong contrast between the destruction and slaughter (**5:5-6**) waiting for the **unrighteous** and the blessings waiting for the **righteous** at the coming of the Lord

- **4:12** – also with words of warning

Illustration: According to a traditional Jewish story, Abraham was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man weary from age and travel, coming toward him. Abraham rushed out, greeted him, and then invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink.

The old man immediately began eating without saying any prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?" The old traveler replied, "I worship fire only and I revere no other god."

When he heard this, Abraham became angry, grabbed the old man, and threw him out his tent into the cold night air.

When the old man had departed, God called to Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he does not worship you."

God answered, "I have suffered him these eighty years although he dishonors me. You couldn't endure him for one night?"

➔ When we consider how patient and merciful God is with us, how can we not be patient and long-suffering towards difficult situations and difficult people?

Application: In light of the imminence of Christ's return, we must be ready and on the alert (**Matt 24:42-44; 25:1-12**) living each moment as if Christ was returning this very day.

Colossians 3: 12-13 "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

Transition: Be patient.....

2nd Virtue ...

II. Be Thankful 5:9

Point – What is the opposite of complaining and grumbling?

- the command God gives is a negative command

If our hearts are filled with Thanksgiving, there is no room for bitterness and complaining and grumbling.

Proof – **James 5:9** – "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door."

"Do not complain" – present imperative + ~~on~~ specific command

- Stop complaining!

Point – to extend the illustration - if two farmers start using their sickles on one another, they are not going to have a very good harvest

Galatians 5:15 “If you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.”

- how sad in Christian churches – the infighting and bickering
- **Malachi 1** – God used Malachi to warn the nation of Israel regarding offering polluted defective sacrifice
- in NT church, when there is infighting, that is a Malachi 1 situation
- when those outside the church see this, it puts a stain on the name of Christ
- this is what James is talking about here - the unbridled tongue, uncontrolled tongue – **1:26; 3:2,5**
- God keeps bringing up the tongue because it is so powerful

Inside AND outside → includes open complaint and grumbling AND grumbling and complaining in the heart

- God wants a settled heart
- God wants an established heart
- God wants a resolute heart

James does not tolerate unstable people

- **1:6-8** – Double Minded (Two Minds)
- **3:11** – Forked Tongue (Two Tongued)
- **4:4** – (Two Hearts)
- **4:8** – Double-Minded (Two Minds)

“that you yourselves may not be judged”

- purpose statement

5:9b - “behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.”

- Third time in these three verses of the imminence of Christ
- perfect tense – He is standing NOW!
- His foot is already on the doorstep

“**the Judge**” who is able to “save and to destroy” (4:11-12)

- The certain return of the Lord is both a comfort and a warning

Illustration: A cowboy was driving a pickup down a dirt road with his dog in back and his horse in the trailer. He went too fast around a curve and had a terrible accident. The truck and trailer rolled and tumbled violently before coming to a rest.

A highway patrol officer eventually came upon the scene. He saw the horse first. Realizing the serious nature of its injuries, he drew his revolver and put the animal out of his misery. He walked around the accident and found the dog, also hurt critically. He couldn't bear to hear it whine in pain, so he ended the dog's suffering as well.

Finally he located the cowboy off in the weeds. He had suffered multiple fractures. "How are you doing buddy?" the policeman asked. The cowboy, looked at the smoking gun in the trooper's hand, quickly replied, "Never felt better!"

That is a whimsical story but the point is well taken.

Application: After we have spent 5 minutes in heaven, don't you think we will be ashamed we ever complained at all.

“**Complaining against one another**” is the devil's music

- it is better to be mute than to murmur

Transition: Be **patient**, be **thankful**.....

3rd Virtue ...

III. Be Steadfast

5:10-11

Point – Impervious to pressure, unswerving loyalty

Endurance

- perseverance, fortitude, staying power

- resolve, tenacity, single-mindedness

God balances privileges with responsibilities, blessings with burdens. If not we would become pampered, spoiled children.

A common theme in the General Epistles (Hebrews –Jude; non-Pauline Epistles) is suffering and endurance. Most of the original recipients of the letters are suffering and enduring trials.

Proof – James 5:10-11 – “**As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.** ¹¹**Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.**”

This is a **command** – what he is literally saying is that you “Receive the example of the prophets”

- “**the prophets**” – the OT prophets – from Abel to John the Baptist

“**who spoke in the name of the Lord**”

- Important Qualifier!!
- Those who spoke of the Lord
- There are those who speak: prophetically and there are those who speak: presumptuously

Interesting biblical historical note – the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord who suffered, suffered much more, almost exclusively, at the hands of the people of God, Israel, than the pagan enemies of God

- persecution from inside God’s nation of Israel
- Jesus talks about this in **Matt 23:31, 37**;
- future fulfillment of that in the case of righteous, Spirit-filled Stephen - **Act 7:25, 52**

James moves from the general example of OT prophets as a whole and zooms into a single example *par excellence* of a man of God who endured suffering and endured it well – Job

5:11 – “Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job”

Patience and Endurance!

“endured” – ³ ~~was~~ → steadfast endurance under difficulties and trials

- courage to withstand whatever the trials may be
- **1:3-4 1:12** – “perseveres” – same word
- blessed are those who have the courage of **Joshua 1** and **Psalm 55** to withstand whatever the suffering may be
- it is not a passive attitude of submission, but a brave heart of courage which confronts difficulties and contends against them

James is the only NT book (Wisdom) with a direct reference to Job:

- the endurance of Job was unswerving loyalty to the Lord
- his own wife turns against him: **"Curse God and die" she hurls in his face. But from his seat on an ash dump he says to her, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" (Job 1:20-22; 2:9-10).**

The heroes of the faith weren't timid, weak, passive men.

Our suffering is the stage for God to show His mercy and compassion.

5:11b - “and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.”

God does not leave His faithful, patient, enduring children without reward!

- Job 42:10-12
- He is Judge
- He is full of compassion and is merciful ... for those who endure

If we want to reap the blessing, we must be prepared to carry the burden and fight the battle.

- understanding that God ultimately is the One who carries it for us and fights for us without taking away our responsibility

Application: The sovereign will of God will never take you where the sovereign grace of God cannot keep you. \

He doesn't always make us see His reasons for our suffering, but He gives every one of us grace to cope with them, and He tells us "be patient and endure."

When we find ourselves in the fire, we remember that God keeps His gracious hand on the thermostat!

CONCLUSION

Mehdi Dibaj was an Iranian pastor. He served nine years in prison on the charge of apostasy. He had followed Christ for forty-five years.

For two years he had been caged within the tiniest cell, more like a box than a room. He could not stretch out in it. He received three death sentences while in prison.

A week or so before the official death sentence was to be carried out on Mehdi Dibaj, in January 1994, the church in Iran, through the Pastor Haik Hovsepian Mehr, released Mehdi Dibaj's written testimony to the Sari court, and it was published in the west. Millions of people all over the world saw it.

There was such an international outcry at the publication of the letter that Dibaj was released immediately. He was sixty years of age. Within days, his friend and co-pastor, Haik Hovsepian Mehr paid the price of releasing it by being murdered. At his funeral Dibaj said, *"I should have died, not brother Haik."*

Months later, another friend, 62 year-old Tateos Michaelin, Presbyterian Chairman of the Council of Protestant Ministers of Iran, was also murdered. He was a scholar, an expert in Persian literature, translator of over 60 books into the Farsi language. Then, a week later, Medhi Dibaj also was murdered.

On June 24, 1994, he was abducted from a street in Tehran and his body was discovered on July 6th in a forest in the western part of the city. He had been tortured for days prior to his murder.

Mehdi Dibja's Testimony is one of the most courageous statements of martyrdom of the 20th century. Its whole spirit manifests what God's call to all Christians through the book of James "Stand firm!" (As you read this, remember that he wrote this to the court of Muslims)

With all humility I express my gratitude to the Judge of all heaven and earth for this precious opportunity, and with brokenness I wait upon the Lord to deliver me from this court trial according to his promises. I also beg the honored members of the court present to listen with patience to my defense and with respect for the name of the Lord.

I am a Christian, a sinner who believes Jesus has died for my sins on the cross and who, by his resurrection and victory over death, has made me righteous in the presence of the holy God. The true God speaks about this fact in his holy Word, the gospel. Jesus means Savior 'because he will save his people from their sins'. Jesus paid the penalty of our sins by his own blood and gave us a new life so that we can live for the glory of God by the help of the Holy Spirit and be like a dam against corruption, be a channel of blessing and healing, and be protected by the love of God.

In response to this kindness, he has asked me to deny myself and be his fully surrendered follower, and not fear people even if they kill my body, but rather rely on the creator of life who has crowned me with the crown of mercy and compassion, and who is the great protector of his beloved ones and their great reward.

I have been charged with 'apostasy'! The invisible God who knows our hearts has given assurance to us Christians that we are not among the apostates who will perish but among the believers so that we may save our lives. In Islamic law, an apostate is one who does not believe in God, the prophets or the resurrection of the dead. We Christians believe in all three!

They say, 'You were a Muslim and you have become a Christian.' No, for many years I had no religion. After searching and studying I accepted God's call and I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to receive eternal life. People choose their religion but a Christian is chosen by Christ. He says, 'You have not chosen me but I have chosen you.' From when? Before the foundation of the world.

People say, 'You were a Muslim from your birth.' God says, 'You were a Christian from the beginning.' He states that he chose us thousands of years ago, even before the creation of the universe, so that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we may be his! A Christian means one who belongs to Jesus Christ.

The eternal God who sees the end from the beginning, and who has chosen me to belong to him, knew from everlasting whose heart would be drawn to him and also those who would be willing to sell their faith and eternity for a pot of porridge. I would rather have the whole world against me but know that the almighty God is with me, be called an apostate but know that I have the approval of the God of glory, because man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart, and for him who is God for all eternity nothing is impossible. All power in heaven and on earth is in his hands. The Almighty God will raise up anyone he chooses and bring down others, accept some and reject others, send some to heaven and others to hell.

Now because God does whatever he desires, who can separate us from the love of God? Or who can destroy the relationship between the Creator and the creature or defeat a heart that is faithful to his Lord? He will be safe and secure under the shadow of the Almighty! Our

refuge is the mercy seat of God who is exalted from the beginning. I know in whom I have believed, and he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him to the end until I reach the Kingdom of God, the place where the righteous shine like the sun, but where the evildoers will receive their punishment in hell.

They tell me 'Return!' But from the arms of my God to whom can I return? Is it right to accept what people are saying instead of obeying the Word of God? It is now forty-five years that I am walking with the God of miracles, and his kindness upon me is like a shadow and I owe him for his fatherly love and concern.

The love of Jesus has filled all my being and I feel the warmth of his love in every part of my body. God, who is my glory and honor and protector, has put his seal of approval upon me through his unsparing blessings and miracles. This test of faith is a clear example. The good and kind God reproves and punishes all those whom he loves. He tests them in preparation for heaven. The God of Daniel, who protected his friends in the fiery furnace, has protected me for nine years in prison and all the bad happenings have turned out for our good and gain, so much so that I am filled overflowing with joy and thankfulness.

The God of Job has tested my faith and commitment in order to strengthen my patience and faithfulness. During these nine years he has freed me from all my responsibilities so that under the protection of his blessed Name, I would spend my time in prayer and study of his Word, with heart-searching and brokenness, and grow in the knowledge of my Lord. I praise the Lord for this unique opportunity. 'You gave me space in my confinement, my difficult hardships brought healing and your kindness revived me.' Oh what great blessings God has in store for those who fear him!

They object to my evangelizing. But 'If you find a blind person near a well and keep silent then you have sinned' (Persian poem). It is our religious duty, as long as the door of God's mercy is open, to convince evildoers to turn from their sinful ways and find refuge in him in order to be saved from the wrath of a righteous God and from the coming dreadful punishment.

Jesus Christ says, 'I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved.' 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no

other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' Among the prophets of God, only Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and he is our living intercessor forever.

He is our Savior and he is the Son of God. To know him means to know eternal life. I, a useless sinner, have believed in his beloved person and all his words and miracles recorded in the gospel, and I have committed my life into his hands. Life for me is an opportunity to serve him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ. Therefore, I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honor of his holy name, but am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord and enter his kingdom sooner, the place where the elect of God enter everlasting life, but the wicked to eternal damnation. May the shadow of God's kindness and his hand of blessing and healing be upon you and remain forever. Amen.

Mehdi Dibaj