

## Wisdom for Wholeness: Wait for It

James 5:7-11

A few years ago when I was taking about a 7 hour drive from our home in Virginia to my school in Kentucky for a weeklong seminar, I had checked out the audio book *Unbroken* from the library to listen to on the drive. About an hour into the drive I popped the first CD in and instantly fell into a trance hearing the story of Louis Zamperini. Louis was a star athlete who competed in the 1936 Olympics and nearly ran a 4-minute mile. Then he was drafted to fight in WW2 and became a pilot, his plane was shot down in 1943 over the Pacific Ocean and he and a friend floated on a life raft in the pacific for 47 days in shark-infested waters. They were finally picked up by the Japanese Navy and sent to a series of Japanese prisons where they were tortured and beaten for nearly 2 years. I won't give the whole story away in case you want to read it, but Louis did manage to live till the end of the war and was eventually freed and came back to the US.

The reason the book is called *Unbroken* is because of the unbelievable endurance that Louis had despite incredible odds. There's a section of the book I want to read to you from the 47 days floating on the raft in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. At this point there were 3 men on the boat, but eventually only 2 would be rescued.

*“Though all three men faced the same hardship, their differing perceptions of it appeared to be shaping their fates. Louie and Phil's hope displaced their fear and inspired them to work toward their survival, and each success renewed their physical and emotional vigor. Mac's resignation seemed to paralyze him and the less he participated in their efforts to survive, the more he slipped. Though he did the least, as the days passed, it was he who faded the most. Louie and Phil's optimism, and Mac's hopelessness, were becoming self-fulfilling.”*

You can see how much each man's outlook and expectation for the future impacted how he dealt with the terrible events. As followers of Christ we always have reason for optimism, no matter what we are facing. Patient endurance is always possible for us because of the hope we have in the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you remember from last week in James 5:1-6 James was addressing wealthy, unbelieving landowners who were exploiting the poor in order to grow and maintain wealth. James called them to repentance and warned us to avoid falling into a life driven by money because of the judgment that is to come. Now, he turns his attention to followers of Christ and encourages them with specific detail in how to respond to persecution, oppression, and even just suffering in general in 5:7-11. In verses 7-11 we are going to find **3 Wise Responses to Suffering**.

### **1. Be Patient Because the Lord is Coming (vv. 7-8)**

I want you to notice right away in verse 7 that James links his instructions in these verses to what he has said in verses 1-6 with the word therefore, and he turns his attention to those who are followers of Christ by using the word “brothers” again.

If the rich and powerful really do exploit the poor and weak AND, if they have misery and judgment awaiting them, then we can be patient in this life. Our outlook on the future motivates endurance and patience in the present. James ties the cultivation of patience to the hope and expectation of a particular event in the future, the Parousia or coming of Christ. The idea of the “coming” of Christ in the future is that He will return bodily to the earth. He came once at his birth, ascended to the Father after His resurrection, and He will come again. This will be a real, physical arrival and Christians are meant to long for this coming. Why? Because the Parousia of Christ will mean the judgment of the wicked and powerful and the vindication and rescue of the poor, righteous, and obedient. Having this hope fortifies us to endure suffering in the present.

But what specifically does this virtue of patience look like? James unfolds the details in the rest of verse 7 and into verse 8. Let’s read those. In verse 7 he paints this beautiful picture of a farmer who has planted seed in the ground and is waiting patiently for the fruit that will come. The patience of the farmer involves eager and joyful expectation. Notice that the fruit he is hoping for is precious.

We often think of waiting for something as an ordeal. It’s frustrating to wait at a stoplight, to wait at the doctor’s office, or to wait on our CPA to tell us how much money we owe in taxes. Waiting with patience is different. It doesn’t involve dread, but anticipation. It’s more like a child going to bed on December 24<sup>th</sup> knowing that the morning light will bring eagerly anticipated gifts.

But what's so interesting about waiting with patience is that we are anticipating something that is totally out of our control. The farmer waits and hopes in the early and late rains, but the farmer cannot dictate when those rains will come. Listen to Deut. 11:14. Only God knows when the rains will come and only God knows when Christ will return to bring judgment to the rich and vindication to His people. To wait patiently means being confident that God will do what He says and trusting Him for His wise and sovereign timing, which isn't always our timing, is it?

While God doesn't operate on the timing we want, we can be patient because our waiting really won't be that long. Look at verse 8. When James describes the coming of the Lord as "at hand" he means that it's so close that the impact is already being felt. We are in the last days, as we talked about last time. Christ's return is imminent, and we can take heart in that reality. In verse 8 James commands us to "establish our hearts." We can take courage, strength, and resolved from the anticipated coming of the Lord. We can face difficult circumstances and patiently wait for God to work because we KNOW He is working and will work.

So, think of a soldier, bunkered down, and trying to hold his position against the onslaught of the enemy. That soldier sees his sides planes fly in from overhead and attack the enemy. He knows help is at hand and will arrive any moment to release him from his difficulty. He joyfully turns his attention to the task at hand, eagerly anticipating reinforcements and confident he can hold out a while longer. Be patient because the Lord is coming. Our second wise respond to suffering is found in verse 9.

## **2. Don't Grumble Because the Judge is Near (v. 9)**

One of the most natural responses to suffering is to grumble against another person or even against the circumstances you are facing. This is why James exhorts us in verse 9 to guard our hearts and lips and keep them from this sin. We aren't truly waiting with patience when we begin to grumble and complain. Look at verse 9.

We grumble when we are impatient. Taking the example of the farmer in verse 7, we can easily imagine a farmer getting antsy about the rain and beginning to get short with his wife or children. He has stopped trusting God's providence and care

and he begins to gripe to them and maybe even about them. One of the quickest ways to determine that you are NOT exercising patience is to detect the presence of complaining when you face difficulty. James has been quite clear throughout this letter concerning the significance of our words and he helpfully returns to this theme here. Let me remind you of James 3:2.

Of course, the problem with grumbling is what we saw in chapter 4:11-12. When you begin to grumble you show a dissatisfaction with the way God has ordered your life and you show that you think you could do better. When I complain I am essentially saying, "God, you're not doing this quite right. I know you think I really need this difficult circumstance right now, but I know better than you and I'm going to let everyone else know that I know better than you."

James understands grumbling to mean that I have taken over God's position as judge, and there's a major problem with that. Look at the rest of verse 9. You and I will be held accountable for our words and the fact that Christ's return is so near, should make us choose our words very carefully. So, to respond to suffering we grow in patience and avoid grumbling and we do both because of Christ's imminent return. But we also have amazing examples to learn from and this is our third wise response.

### **3. Imitate the Faithful Because of the Lord's Character (vv. 10-11)**

One of the best ways to learn a new skill or to grow in a virtue is to imitate those who possess the skill or character quality we want. Scripture is filled with wonderful examples of those who remained steadfast in the midst of suffering and persecution. James gives us two examples here. First, look at verse 10. It's probably best to read this as "As an example of patient suffering." It's really one idea that James is conveying here, and it's been the theme of this section.

The OT prophets received the Word of God from God and then spoke that word to the nation of Israel including the Kings. This did not often go well for the prophets, but they endured and remained faithful to the task God had given them, even while suffering. How? Listen to Hebrews 11:36-40 as it speaks specifically about the OT prophets. What motivated them to endure? I think Hebrews 11:13 speaks for every example of faith given to us in Hebrews 11, especially the prophets who patiently suffered. They were confident in the future because God had promised something better for them, so they were able to

endure. We hold people like this in high esteem, look at the beginning of verse 11. There's something attractive about those who remain steadfast and faithful in the face of persecution and trials. But James also offers us another example. Look at the rest of verse 11.

I don't know if you've ever read the book of Job, but it's an absolute masterpiece. As we meet Job in chapter 1 he is a righteous man who feared God and turned away from evil. Without his knowledge Job is caught up in a discussion between God and Satan and suffers unbelievable trials. All his children are killed in freak accidents, all his wealth is stolen or destroyed, and even his health is taken from him as he gets sores all over his body so nasty and painful that he has to scrape them with a piece of broken pottery to try and get some relief.

Job's initial response is amazing. Listen to 1:20-22. Shockingly, he continues to trust God, even in these circumstances. If you read only the first two chapters of Job it would be easy to think that his steadfastness was an unquestioning stoicism. It would be easy to think Job never had questions and never wrestled with what was happening to him.

But as you read the book and get into chapter 3 you find Job's friends come to comfort him and the ensuing discussion reveals that Job is struggling. Just listen to Job 3:1-4 and 17:1-2. Chapter after chapter we find the friends trying to convince Job that he has somehow sinned to bring down this evil on his head and we find Job struggling, but continuing to affirm his trust in God. Listen to Job 19:23-26.

Here's the lesson for us. James tells us that Job is an example of steadfastness in suffering. Job struggled, but continued to trust God through suffering. Steadfastness doesn't mean no emotion and no anguish of soul. Patient suffering can involve questions, grief, and difficulty of heart. But, Job is an example to us because he began well, and ended well. Listen to Job 42:1-6. Job never abandoned his faith and always submitted to God's sovereign and good hand. How was he able to do this? Look at the rest of James 5:11.

How have we seen the purpose of God? Well, we see it in the story of Job. You could translate the word purpose as "goal" or "outcome." What do we find at the end of the book of Job? The purpose or outcome of the story is that God is compassionate and merciful, as James says. God is compassionate in that he has

affection for us and he is merciful in that He sees us in a miserable condition and desire to help.

At the end of the book of Job God forgives Job's friends and blesses Job financially and with more children. He restores Job's life and health to him and in this we see God's compassion and mercy. Listen to Job 42:7-17.

When you are suffering, remember the steadfastness of Job and remember the character of God. Fight for faith in the compassion and mercy of God and know that His purposes are to do good to us, even in the midst of great trials.

## Sermon Reflection Questions

10-11-20

- How is Christian endurance similar and different to the hope held by Louis Zamperini in the example given in the sermon?
- What is the connection between verses 1-6 and verses 7-11?
- How would you describe the virtue of patience as James gives it in verses 7-8?
- What does it look like to “establish your hearts”? (v. 8) How can we practically do this?
- How would you distinguish between grumbling and the sort of questions the Psalms ask in passages like Psalm 42:9?
- What does grumbling reveal about one’s heart?
- Why do you think examples are such powerful ways to learn and grow?
- In what ways are the prophets examples of patient suffering for us? Can you give any specific instances of OT prophets exemplifying patient suffering?
- What do passages like Job 3:1-4 and Job 17:1-2 teach us about the steadfastness of Job?

- What was the “outcome” of the story of Job?
- How do the compassion and mercy of God relate to our patient endurance of suffering?
- What is one thing you need to change in belief or action as a result of hearing God’s Word today?

Key Quotes:

*“Now he tells poor Christians to be patient, for the Lord will judge the wicked in his time – and his time may be later than we please.” – Daniel Doriani*

*"But grumbling against those who are close to us is particularly likely to occur when we are under pressure or facing difficult circumstances. We vent the pressure from a stressful work environment or from ill health on our close friends and family." – Douglas Moo*

*"But any reading of Job reveals a character who stuck it out, who trusted in God, and who did so fully aware of the fundamental injustice he had experienced. Maybe, then, Job is the perfect example for the oppressed poor. Patience here need not be understood as quietude or passivity; perhaps genuine patience involves realities like protesting to God, yet without surrendering one's integrity or one's faith in God or losing the path of following Jesus." – Scot Mcknight*

*"James appeals to the compassion and mercy of God, as he often does, but he does so again not in the abstract nor casually but to assure the poor oppressed of the community that God can remake all things. As Job lost it all at the hands of the Enemy, and God restored it all in duplicate, so the oppressed poor can count on God's mercy and God's goodness that maybe they, too, will find 'the Lord's end' better than the beginning." – Scot Mcknight*