

## Patience

James 4:13-5:12

KV 5:7,8 “Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”

We have been asked this question before: are you ready for the second coming of our Lord? If he comes again, what condition of life will he find you in? What is the state of the heart that he will see? Thank God, truly, that he is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). Thank God for this day. Now is the time to repent, now is the time to get our hearts right with God, so that we will be ready when he comes again. The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and no one knows the day or the hour. Since he has been so patient with us, let us make the best use of the time we have now and in turn be patient, trusting our Lord, day by day until he comes again, whenever that may be.

James begins this passage by addressing those who do not trust the Lord, but trust in themselves or in the riches of this world. Look at v.13, “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’” Now you might wonder, what’s the big problem with this statement? The fault here is that this person is making an overconfident and boastful claim about his future. He does not bother to check whether or not it is in line with God’s will, and forgets that we all must have an absolute dependence on God. Take for example, the parable of the rich young fool Jesus spoke about in Luke 12. One year he had an abundant harvest, more than he knew what to do with. He stored up the extra in a barn and said to himself, “I have enough grain for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you, then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” Jesus says, “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:21).” We must remember that God is the sovereign ruler over the universe – even our best plans can be defeated, and He has the authority to take our very lives.

We cannot predict what will happen tomorrow. So many people had dreams of owning a home a little over 5 years ago, and houses were going left and right. They were allowing people with poor credit to purchase bigger homes than they could afford. After all, home prices are on the rise, they seemed stable, and it seemed like they would never go down. It seemed like easy money – banks were making money, corporations were making money, everyone was all set. Time to take life easy, drink and be merry right? Until those who bought homes were not able to pay the mortgage. And the number of people who could not pay their mortgages increased and increased. This led to the big housing market crash around 2009, and housing prices plummeted. Giant corporations and banks were going out of business, and dreams were shattered. We should not put our trust in the riches of this world.

James helps us to put this into perspective. Look at v.14, “What is your life?” I like that question, “What is your life?” What is your life? James says, “You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” The life here James refers to is your life here on earth. Our lives are tiny compared to all of time. Our Lord Jesus Christ died over 2000 years ago, yet the majority of people who ever lived since that time did not live past 100. Our lives are like mists,

like the mist that appears over your cup of coffee or tea, they're here for 2 minutes, and then they're gone. Now look at your life in light of eternity. 80 years here on earth is nothing compared to an eternity – either in heaven or in hell. What is your life here on earth? It is but a mist, a drop in a big bucket. So life is not about what you will eat. Life is not about what you will wear, or how much money you have. Like you, these things will fade away just as quickly. Life is about eternity, it's about knowing and fearing the one, eternal and true God, and his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus says in Matt 6:25, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" And he tells us God knows what we need, do not worry, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So instead of saying, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money," we ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." Instead of trusting ourselves, we trust God. Instead of trusting in the riches of this world, we depend on God. Instead of rebelling against God, we love God. Instead of disobeying God, we serve God. It seems like if we say "If it is the Lord's will" too often, it would lose its meaning – but this verse doesn't merely mean reciting the words. To say "If it's the Lord's will," is really an understanding in our hearts that we are submitting ourselves first and foremost to God's will. So if our plans conflict with God's plans, we will surrender our plans to his.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will." God's will is good, it is pleasing and it is perfect. When we seek to do his will, we will seek to do good. Look at v.17, "If anyone then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." When we are transformed by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, having our hearts and our minds renewed, we receive the wisdom that comes from heaven – we are enabled to do good works. What are good works? They are works that bring glory to God. We know what they are – they are works of love, of mercy, of charity. We use what we have for the good of others. Do you have the gift of teaching? Teach others the gospel. Do you have a gift for serving? Then go and help others. Do you have a gift for encouragement? Encourage others and lift their spirits to the Lord. Do you have a gift of generosity? Relieve the distressed or poor, or give to works of evangelism. How about your artistic or music ability? Use them for the glory of God! Remember all the good the Lord Jesus has done for you, and by the help of the Holy Spirit, seek to do good to others. Seek to do good, not only for brothers and sisters, but for all people, young, old, rich, poor, happy, sad, for God's glory. We are not all perfect at making every effort to do good, but let us seek to practice these good works and increase in them.

There is a warning in v.17 as well, "If anyone knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." The Holy Spirit will convict us when we are doing wrong, particularly if we are doing something we are not supposed to be doing. We become more sensitive to sin. Perhaps there was a certain type of violent movie we liked, but we can no longer watch. Or if we are being distracted or watching too much television, or if we have been unloving or judgmental to our brothers or sisters, even our family members – we may need to humble ourselves, repent or apologize. In any case, let us make every effort, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us to do good to others, so that when our Lord comes again, he may find

us doing good. When we do good, we show that we trust the Lord will help us, and we show we trust that the Lord is sovereign – and it shows that we are waiting patiently, though active, for our Lord to return.

Jesus gives a warning similar to v.17 in Luke 12:47, “The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows.” This sounds harsh, but it is a just punishment, when we look at the wickedness of following our own selfishness in the next few verses. Look at v5:1, “Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.” These rich people are part of the church – remember, this letter is written by James to the twelve tribes scattered across the nations. He tells them to weep and wail, because they will face judgment and misery, and beaten with many blows. These people will not wait patiently for the Lord, but forgot about him completely. Deut 8:10-14 describes this downfall: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful not to forget the Lord your God...otherwise [when you are successful]...then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God.” Rom 1:21 says, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Those who do not thank or praise God forget God, and they slowly degenerate.

What were these rich people doing? Look at v.2 & 3, “Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded.” In James’ time, most wealth consisted of grains, oil and garments. Here you can see described that the wealth has rotted, moths have eaten the clothes, and gold and silver have corroded. These people were hoarding riches, but they had more than they knew what to do with. They had so much excess grain, that it began to rot. They could have given it to the hungry or the needy, but instead, they let it sit at home to rot. Moths ate their clothes. There was a Roman man in history named Lucullus, when asked if he could lend a hundred garments to the theater, he replied that he had five thousand in his house, of which they were welcome to take part or all. (From Albert Barnes’ commentary on Jas 5:2). This might make all the women jealous. This man had 5000 garments!! Who needs that many clothes? With so much unused clothing, the moths came to eat them.

Also, the gold and the silver were corroded. This is a great tragedy. Before, they did not have large banks, financial institutions or organizations that would hold their money – it usually had to be hid some place no one else knew about. Silver doesn’t corrode, but can get tarnished, gold doesn’t get tarnished so easily, but you see here James, perhaps using some exaggeration (hyperbole), says the gold and silver have corroded. What do you see here? It’s wasted money. This money could have been used to help others, but it was hoarded, stored away, until it has turned ugly. It’s ok to save money, in fact it is very wise – to save for your future or your children’s future – the sin here is hoarding the money, out of greed, with no thought of using it wisely. Recently, a man who was head of a mob gang in Boston was arrested, and they found over \$800,000 stashed hidden in his walls. This is not a wise way to store or use money – what if the building were to burn or come down? And now, being arrested, he may not even see this money again.

James says, “Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.” These rich people have no excuse. They have wasted money, and the corrosion of the coins is a witness against them, and makes their punishment even greater. This may be a glimpse of the punishment in hell, where the worm dies not and the fire is never quenched (Mark 9:48). In America, we might not live to an excess of that degree, where we have 5000 garments, but relative to the rest of the world we are the wealthiest nation, and we have a pretty bad record regarding waste. On TV, maybe for the Guinness Book of World Records, they baked the world’s biggest cupcake. It was the 1,224 lbs, 4 ft tall by 10 ft wide. Most people can only eat a fistful. What do they plan to do with all the rest? I knew a friend who worked at McDonalds, and even he was surprised by the amount of food they throw out. And when I was single, the vegetables in my refrigerator usually liquefied. While the vegetables may not testify against me, I should desire to do good, and feed the hungry when I have opportunity.

What else testified against the rich people? Look at v.4, “Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.” The rich people were oppressing the poor. They were taking advantage of them. They hired them to work, but they withheld their wages. This is a wicked thing. When we were little, someone promised my brother \$1 for each pager he would clean. My brother worked all night, painstakingly cleaning all of the sticker goo off each pager, and he cleaned 50 of them. Well, after he returned them to the owner, he never got paid for that. The cries of the harvesters reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. First of all, see that their cry was desperate, so much so it reached the heavens. And where did it go? To the ears of the Lord Almighty. Uh oh. When they say at work, if the CEO gets an email, it means something’s terribly wrong, and someone might be in trouble. The cries of the harvesters reached the Lord Almighty – this also translated as the Lord of hosts – he is the Lord of the armies of heaven and earth. The Lord of hosts has “uncontrollable power, and infinitely numerous was to govern the world, defend his followers, and punish the wicked (Adam Clarke’s commentary on 5:4).” The Lord of hosts! Uncontrollable power! The wicked better watch out.

And yet, here is another testimony, see v.5, “You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.” Now, this does not forbid lawful pleasures. Sometimes you need to rest, for your health. You can enjoy a baseball or basketball game. But what is being condemned here are those who live in ease off of the oppression of others. Also note that having wealth is not sinful in and of itself, but it’s how the wealth is acquired and how it is used that can be sinful. The rich people were withholding their wages, but living in comfort while their servants were living in misery. What also is being condemned are those who live at ease from ill-gotten gain – perhaps from fraud, or gambling. Just this past week, I had to get a new credit card because someone tried to purchase \$1400 from Best Buy in Minnesota with my credit card number. Lastly, those who live solely for pleasure, which includes the former two above, are condemned. What’s living for pleasure? If that’s your sole purpose in life, is to live for the next enjoyment. Today, there are people who live for 5pm (after work is done). There are people who live for the weekend. They are dead during work hours, and live on the weekends. There are those who live for the next vacation. Again I am not condemning vacations, but those who live only for these, who do not do any other good to help others, or glorify God. Their god is their stomach, instead of the Lord Almighty. Every day is

lived for pleasure, they eat sumptuously each day, and from time to time gorge on food and drink.

They have fattened themselves in the day of slaughter. I know this may refer to cows, but think also of an athlete, or soldier, who has now become unfit for sport or battle by fattening themselves. When we indulge in the flesh, and desire all the delights of this world, we make ourselves unfit for taking care of our souls, and for serving the Lord. Our desires become of this world. When the Lord comes again, it will not be a day of deliverance for those who have indulged in a luxurious and self-indulgent lifestyle, but a day of slaughter. Why? Because their hearts have become darkened, to the point they desire to murder the innocent to have their luxuries. Look at v.6 – “You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.” This is where their crimes have reached a high point. They condemn and murder the righteous. James 2 says the rich are those exploiting the poor and dragging them into court. They make them helpless, defenseless, and the rich make themselves powerful. The poor cannot oppose them, and they continue to be oppressed.

Who else was murdered by the rich? None other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now, is God not justified in his vengeance? Jesus was innocent, but they condemned him to the cross, and they crucified him. He did not oppose them, but he was like a lamb, led to the slaughter. Isa 53:7 says, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly (1 Pet 2:22-23).”

Who crucified Jesus? We did. Sinners crucified the Son of God, come down from heaven. 1 Pet 2:24-25 says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness, ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’ For ‘you were like sheep going astray,’ but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, laid down his life for sinners like the rich men. Sinners like you and me. He was died, buried. On the third day, God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the right hand of God. The Lord of hosts should come after you, but he punished his Son. So what must we do? We must repent, and believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and his substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. Otherwise, we remain under the wrath of God.

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, I urge you to repent and believe! Otherwise you remain exposed to the wrath of God, the Lord of hosts. And how can you escape him? You cannot. But if you believe, what next? Look at v.7, “Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.” Be patient, trust in the Lord. The farmer trusts in the Lord, he has to in order to survive. He cannot control the rain, but he waits for it. He waits for the autumn rain, which comes in mid Oct to Nov. This makes the soil fit for sowing, and he sows the seed. Then he waits for the spring rain. If it does not come, he prays for it. Zech 10:1 says, “Ask the Lord for rain in the springtime; it is the Lord who sends the thunderstorms. He gives showers of rain to all people, and plant of the field to everyone.” After the spring rain comes, it refreshes the plants, and makes them ready for the harvest. Notice the

farmer works. He does not wait patiently for the rain, only to watch it comes down. The rain comes down, he works. Likewise, when we wait patiently for the Lord, we watch, we pray, and we do good works, so that we might reap a harvest in heaven. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us pray. Let us do good works. Gal 6:9 says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Just as the farmer patiently waits, you too, patiently wait. Can we all read v.8 together, “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” Be patient, and stand firm. Stand firm. Take heart, and be of good cheer – direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ (2 Th 3:5). Do not forsake the assembling together, but encourage one another, all the more as you see the Day approaching (Heb 10:25). Psalm 27:14 says, “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord. (KJV)” It is the Lord who will strengthen our hearts and cause us to stand firm. The Lord’s coming is near. It’s not clear if this refers to when we die, or when Jerusalem is destroyed, or his second coming, but all three are valid here. When we die, we are called to the Lord. What is our life, but a mist. James wrote this a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem, so he may have thought the Lord may return then. But he didn’t at that time, so that we might come to have life. But be assured, he will come again. 1 Cor 15:58 says, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

Remember from 1 Pet 2:23, Christ did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. This is the essence of being patient: not to retaliate, and to endure bravely. Look at v.9, “Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!” Again, in this letter, James addressed Christians – and there was very tough conflict going on between the rich and the poor. Some of the rich were oppressing the poor! Their own brothers and sisters. But here, James says not to grumble. Do not seek revenge, do not name-call, do not find fault, or criticize. In fact, James sent a harsh rebuke to the rich to repent, or the Lord will punish. And if they refused to repent, they may not have been the Lord’s people, brothers and sisters. But as Christ entrusted himself to God, we too should entrust ourselves to God. The Judge is standing at the door! That means Jesus is on standby, waiting to burst forth. When God gives the signal, that door will break open and all heaven will break loose. He is at the door.

Then we see the prophet’s and Job’s example of perseverance in v.10-11, “Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as 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.” While the first aspect of patience is self-restraint from retaliation, this aspect of patience, the perseverance, is courageous in the face of suffering. The prophets did not shrink back from telling the truth. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke the truth to kings, and suffered for it. I believe they were all martyred for their faith. Job endured suffering patiently. Job was the greatest man among the people of the East, he had vast land and properties. (This shows being rich is not a sin, because his gain was given, and taken away by God). Job was tested by Satan, and he lost his sons and daughters, all but a few servants, he lost all of his sheep and his house collapsed. What did Job do? “At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his

head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.’” In all this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Now James also speaks of his end – in Job 40:10, “After Job had prayed for his friend, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before.” The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the former, he had more sons and daughters, and he died an old man full of years.

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. He was aware of Job’s suffering, but he is the author of life, the Creator of the universe. He gives and takes away, yet he is full of compassion and mercy. The Lord knows our struggles. The Lord knows when we are suffering, and he hears us. Let us be patient, and trust in his compassion and mercy.

Finally, look at v.12, “Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ Otherwise you will be condemned.” Perhaps this is a temptation for us all, whether we are suffering or not, but this is a terrible sin that James wants to root out. If we are to be patient, we must also be truthful to one another. Swearing invokes a higher witness, and has the appearance of making your claims more truthful or forceful. There are times when swearing is appropriate, like in court, to tell the truth, or the President taking office, or even in marriage. But where swearing is not appropriate is in casual conversation. Kids do that all the time. They say, “I swear!” The common custom and practice of swearing was to keep a foot out the door. I read that Martin Luther wrote the Jews had a custom (Luther’s Works, Vol 21:100), not to swear by the name of God, because that was too holy, but they could swear by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem or even by their heads. But since it’s not as “powerful” or binding an oath as swearing by God, they were not under as much penalty for breaking it. It’s like saying something, but crossing your fingers behind your back. It’s a double speak. But here, James even forbids swearing by heaven or earth, or anything else. He says, all you need to say is a simple “Yes,” meaning, let your allegations, your statements be true, or simply, “No,” meaning, let your denials be true. Whatever you say, speak the simple truth, without trying to swear. Otherwise, you will be condemned for sin and hypocrisy.

In conclusion, let us be patient – enduring suffering without retaliation, enduring it courageously, by entrusting ourselves to the Lord. And let us in our patience not grow weary in doing good, by fixing our eyes on Jesus, encouraging one another, and direct our love to God, who will strengthen our hearts. Then, when he comes again, we will receive a rich harvest and a warm welcome into everlasting life in the glorious kingdom of heaven.