

# Patience In Suffering

James 5:7-11

Suffering often involves two sides of an equation. Last week we considered the owner/employers who inflicted suffering upon their workers. This week we'll consider the other side of the equation, the worker/employees who must persevere and endure the suffering that the owners/employers inflict upon them. And though we'll spend most of our time today studying verses 7-11, may we first go back and re-read verses 1-6 of James 5.

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. (James 5:1-6 (ESV))

And then, listen and read along in today's text beginning in verses 7.

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (James 5:7-11 (ESV))

A quick reminder as we begin our study of these words given here. From 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we know that

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV))

And these words that I just read for us here in James 5, are a perfect example of this special truth given here in 2nd Timothy 3. God wants you and me to read, to study, to "dig deeply" into each of these scriptures, so that we can profit from them. These words

are “God breathed” and have the power of the Holy Spirit in them and you and I should engage with these truths, being taught, reprovved, corrected and trained by them.

Here in our text, the Holy Spirit is pleading with you and me, and with all believing Christians everywhere, to do a very difficult thing, to be “patient” whenever we encounter seasons of suffering, because each of us surely will have those seasons. And as we see in this particular context, patience is especially needful as we engage in the most common occurrence of our day, our employment and our business.

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8)

As we’ve learned in the words of the first six verses, one of the most difficult forms of suffering is when mistreatment comes from our employers, but who also happens to be trusted fellow believers in Christ, perhaps even who go to our own church. Or if not our own church, certainly some church near us. Because that is what Christians do. They go to church. But unfortunately, many Christians fail to take the biblical truths they learn in church on into the workplace with them. And then disputes and mistreatments arise, such as the ones spoken about in these first few verses.

And no matter which side of a disagreement we find ourselves on, the owner/employer, or the worker, each one of us can find ways to count ourselves innocent and our actions and behavior as being necessary, and the other party, unfair.

Here in verses one through six, the Apostle James addressed the owners and employers for their misbehaviors in their dealings with their workers, pronouncing the sternest of warnings and rebukes to them, because, although God had given them the greatest of success and prosperity in their business activities, they were still cheating and defrauding their workers. And again, the most surprising part of this equation is, these owners and employers were themselves Christian men.

But unfortunately, success, prosperity and power are conditions that are filled with pitfalls and possibilities for ungodly conduct, even within the hearts and souls of believing Christians.

A reminder from last week’s message . . . our God is a very faithful Father, who has promised to bless us wherever we go. And He had done that with these Christian owners and employers as they were driven from their homeland in Israel into the foreign land where they were then living. But what had been their response to the way God

had blessed them. They had responded by not “managing God’s blessings” in a Godly way.

Unfortunately, money has a way of captivating the hearts of even the most ardent of believers, corrupting their thoughts and behaviors. And these Christian owners and employers stumbled as they “managed their blessings”, and they began to cheat and defraud their workers.

But now, here beginning in verse 7, we are given an intimate look at what takes place on the other side of this equation of conflict between the employers and the employees, this time, the Christian employees who are suffering. And in these words, we also see a very special requirement that God places firmly upon a Christian’s heart and soul as they experience seasons of mistreatment and suffering.

Here, God begins by encouraging those who are mistreated to be “patient in their suffering”, to bear up to afflictions without murmuring, to endure injury without revenge. And these words and this concept are so very important for us to understand and to accept. Our sufferings, though they be very personal and painful, must be suffered for the same reasons that Christ suffered, and that is so that others might gain, and not just for this lifetime but also and especially eternally.

And no, we can’t save another person’s soul. But in our involvements with other people, we are to be His very image, so that “others might see our good works and glorify the Father”. That is what Jesus did in His suffering and that is what you and I must do in our suffering, suffering that will glorify God and gain souls for His kingdom.

And so again, here in these words in our passage, we are being strongly exhorted to be patient in our suffering, to bear up to our afflictions, without murmuring, to endure our injury without revenge. And if God doesn’t come to our aid as quickly as we would hope He would, we must wait for him.

The vision given here for the Lord’s help to come is for an appointed time, later. And because of that, we are exhorted to let our patience be lengthened out to longsuffering. And our patience is not to be of the same kind as that of the secular world, but is to be a kind of patience that has the will of God in view, His plan and His wisdom, trusting that He has a future blessing in store not only for us, but also for those souls that we might gain for Him in the process.

And take note that when God calls for patience, our wait is not for the other party in the dispute to change their behavior, our wait is ever and always upon God and for His answers. Listen!

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:7-8 (ESV))

These words encouraging us to have “patience until the Lord Jesus comes” are the key to our being able to withstand the suffering. And may I add, this “waiting time” is not necessarily implying that we must wait until His 2nd coming. That is true of course. But “His coming” to us is already here, “at hand”, “ever-present” and “ongoing” within the hearts and souls of believing Christians. We learned in Luke 17:21 that His kingdom, His presence, is already “in our midst” and “within us”. We just need to be patient as His plans and His purposes are being worked out.

But again, patience while we are being mistreated truly is so very difficult. Few there are that are able to withstand it. Suffering, especially of the extended kind, can often cause us to do things that we should not do, wrong things. Why? It’s because within each of us, there is an inborn sense of “fairness” and “unfairness”. And in our human condition, our soul demands and cries out to be treated fairly.

And such feelings are not new. Listen to these words by the Psalmist, written thousands of years ago. Psalm 73,

2 . . . as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. 5 They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. (Psalm 73:2-6 (ESV))

Too often, we Christians get caught up watching and envying those who are enjoying their very public success, even and especially those who are making their fortunes off the efforts and sweat of people like us. And it doesn’t take long for us to add up the clues in front of us, clues that tell us that we are doing all the work and those “rich people” are reaping all the benefits off the “sweat of our brow”. And too often, we become bitter. And here in verse 9, God warns us,

9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. (James 5:9 (ESV))

Here again, God is reminding us that though we are being mistreated, we must not “return evil for evil”. We must not become like those who are mistreating us, else we will be judged right along with them.

. . . May I take a moment and share with you a particular vision that I have whenever I consider matters such as these, a vision that pictures all the parties to a matter sitting down at a table to consider that matter. Some of those involved are in positions of authority and power, others are observers, and then others, often ourselves who might not have much control over the things that are taking place, but are fully involved, and oftentimes, suffering.

That is the vision I have for the things God is saying here in these words. God has a plan, a long-term plan for each of the people involved in the circumstances being presented to us. Here, in verses 1 through 6, we have a circumstance of two sides of a business transaction, in this case, all being Christians. One side, the owners, men of great wealth and authority and power. The other side, the workers, men of very little wealth and authority and power. And as sometimes takes place, those in authority are mistreating those who are beneath them in authority.

In my vision of this circumstance, I picture all these men sitting at a table, each with their own perceived wealth, authority and power on display. And while it might look as if those who have the greatest wealth have all of the advantages in this meeting, that is only true in the “short-term”. Why, because always seated at the head of that table is our “all-knowing”, “all-wise”, “all-powerful” God. And God has a very special plan, a plan for the “good” of everyone seated around the table. And yes, that does also include the most corrupt cheaters and liars in the crowd, because He loves them too and wants to redeem them.

And while it may appear that the wealthiest in the crowd are holding all the good advantages, the one at the head of the table, God Almighty Himself, is ever and always the one who will ultimately make all the final decisions.

And again, while we who are suffering most at the moment would like for God to go ahead and bring us relief in our distress, He has so much more to accomplish than just relieving our immediate suffering. His desire is that every person seated at the table would prosper. And not so much to prosper financially, but much more to prosper “morally” and “spiritually”. And that often takes a much longer period of time. And so, the sufferers are called on to be patient, to have long-suffering.

And here, God gives us this brief kind of parable, so that we can grasp His intentions better. He gives the example of a farmer, waiting for the processes of the growing season to work their way out. It takes time for seeds to germinate and then to gain growth and maturity. And they need rain and sunshine to help them.

And so it is with people and their growth in matters of the Spirit. For the Christians who isolate themselves from the church and from the word of God being poured out upon them, they will not grow and mature. Their growth will be stunted and their fruits minimal, if at all. And with people, oftentimes the most important part of the plan and the process is suffering.

And that is a very strange factor within this equation, that we who are in less authority must suffer, so that those who are in greater authority might gain. But if we will be patient and join with God in His plan, though suffering will take place, all those who join with Him will be blessed beyond measure.

So then, what do you and I take home with us from these words of truth? It is that yes, sufferings truly will come to us, whether in our workplace or in the culture around us. But we must not join with the loud protesting voices and demand to have our rights and to never be mistreated. But we are instead to “stop and look for God’s hand” in the matter that is hurting us, and to patiently join with Him, trusting that He really does have a plan, and His blessings will eventually come to those of us who wait upon Him. So then,

7 Be patient until the coming of the Lord. (James 5:7)

And join with Him, saying

10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11 (NIV))