

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF JAMES

PATIENCE!

Read James 5:7-12

Introduction

According to James, his readers must be patient, like farmers who wait through the rainy seasons for the harvest to be ready. They must strengthen their hearts, stand firm in their faith, and refuse to give into grumbling against each other in their suffering. Instead, they should follow the example of the Old Testament prophets and Job, who remained faithful to God through great suffering and persecution. Then, as now, God knows what His people are going through. He is still compassionate and merciful. He will reward those who are faithful.

Patience and Endurance

Christ taught us to understand His coming. Be ready, he said. Stay awake and alert. The Son of Man will come at a time you do not expect. Be ready.

Are you ready? Am I? James echoes Jesus' words:

"Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord..." (James 5:7a)

The verb in verse 7 and 8 translated "be patient" is Greek makrothymeō, a compound word, formed from makros, "long, lasting long," and thymos, "that which is moved, and which moves, vital force," similar in meaning to the word pneuma, "spirit." So, a literal translation of makrothymeō might be "to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart," or "to remain tranquil while waiting, have patience, wait."

"Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain." (v7)

James uses the farmer as an example. First Century people were much closer to agriculture than our society today. In Palestine there were two rainy seasons: the autumn rains (the "early rains") and the spring rains ("the latter rains"). Both had to fall for the crops to ripen and be ready for harvest. There was no use trying to hurry it up. Farmers learned patience.

But harvest was another thing. There is a prime time to harvest a particular crop. It varies, of course, from crop to crop. Harvest time is affected by temperature, sunlight, rain or irrigation, insects, and even impending weather conditions. When it is time to harvest, farmers sometimes workday and night to get the crop in, because if they do not harvest at the right time, they can lose the entire crop or greatly reduce its value.

Jesus' Second Coming can be compared to a harvest. There's no hurrying up the time. We must be patient, and hopeful, sure of eventual harvest. But like the farmer, we must be ready. When the harvest is here there is no time for waiting. It must happen today.

Patience vs. Grumbling

"Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (v9)

Complaining can be so sweet sometimes. Just griping gives you a chance to get some of that internal frustration out where others can feel sorry for you. James had a word for it: grumbling. The Greek word is stenazō, "sigh, groan" because of an undesirable circumstance. It has the meaning "to express

discontent, complain" But our sighs and groans signal impatience and discontent. Why is God so hard on complainers? Because our grumbling about people is a thinly veiled way of complaining about God. Complaining is unbelief.

The Israelites had been enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years. Then God sent a deliverer, Moses, who wasn't any too happy himself to be in that role. But he went. No sooner than he began to obey God, however, people began to complain. He went to Pharaoh with God's message and came away with no more than the command that the Hebrews had to find their own straw to make bricks (Exodus 5). The people blamed him. Once the people were free -- and hemmed in by the Red Sea -- they complained again (Exodus 14).

Each time the Lord brought them through one victory they rejoiced. But as soon as another problem came along, they grumbled again. They complained about lack of food; God sent manna. They complained about lack of meat; God sent quail. (Exodus 16). They complained about thirst; God brought water out of the rock (Exodus 17). It went on that way for 40 years. Problem, grumble. Problem, complain. Paul wrote of this generation of Israelites:

"Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted... nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer." (1 Corinthians 10:6, 10)

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." (Philippians 2:14-16).

Moses said with great insight, *"Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord." (Exodus 16:8).* God reminded Samuel of a similar lesson: *"for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." (1 Samuel 8:7).* Either we will be patient, or we will be judged by the Judge himself.

There is a very thin line between grumbling and unbelief. Very thin. What are you complaining about? Your children? Your spouse? Your job? Your health? Aren't you perhaps coming dangerously close to blaming God for allowing this situation? God calls you to pray, and then to patiently trust him to work out your problems. Patiently, with LONG-suffering.

If you grumble at the least provocation, where is your faith in God? Faith without actions is dead faith, James has reminded us. Real faith requires patience -- the patience of Job.

Patience of the Prophets and Job

"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." (vv10-11)

We Christians are not only called to exercise patience when we are tired of waiting, but we are to be steadfast in the face of suffering.⁸² Patient suffering isn't very popular in this generation, but that's what God sometimes calls us to. James gives us two examples of patient suffering.

Prophets: The prophets spoke God's word even when it wasn't popular to do so. Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet" was imprisoned, called a traitor, and rejected by the very people God sent him to help. Many

prophets have been killed for their courage. John the Baptist is an example of a New Testament prophet who was imprisoned for speaking God's word and then beheaded on a whim.

Job: James essentially tells us three things about Job and why he is a significant example for the suffering Christian.

First, we see the perseverance of Job. Passages such as Job 1:20-22 show us the tremendous perseverance of this afflicted man, who refused to curse God despite his severe and mysterious suffering.

Secondly, we see also the end intended by the Lord, speaking of the ultimate goal and purpose of God in allowing the suffering to come upon Job. When we understand that God has a good purpose, even painful things are put into different perspective. "If a man were to attack me with a knife, I would resist him with all my strength, and count it a tragedy if he succeeded. Yet if a surgeon comes to me with a knife, I welcome both him and the knife; let him cut me open, even wider than the knife-attacker, because I know his purpose is good and necessary.

Thirdly, we see further that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. This is not immediately apparent in the story of Job; we can quickly think that God was cruel to Job. Yet upon consideration, we can see that God was indeed very compassionate and merciful.

- God was very compassionate and merciful to Job because He only allowed suffering for a very good reason.
- God was very compassionate and merciful to Job because He restricted what Satan could do against Job.
- God was very compassionate and merciful to Job because He sustained Him with His unseen hand through all his suffering.
- God was very compassionate and merciful to Job because in the whole process God used Satan himself. At the end of it all, God had accomplished something wonderful: To make Job a better and more blessed man than ever. Remember that as good as Job was at the beginning of the book, he was a better man at the end of it. He was better in character, humbler, and more blessed than before.

You may never know why you have to undergo the hardships you do. God knows, you don't. But if you can live your life in praise rather than petulance, in confession rather than complaint, you -- like Job -- can shine as God's trophy in the face of all Satan's cynical sneers. Why must you develop patience? So you can glorify God.

Patience with Our Words

"But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment." (v12)

The final verse in our section, about making rash oaths, may seem out of context, but it is not. Many Jewish people in the time James wrote made distinctions between "binding oaths" and "non-binding oaths." Oaths that did not include the name of God were considered non-binding, and to use such oaths was a way of "crossing your fingers behind your back" when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemned. The Bible does not forbid the swearing of all oaths, only against the swearing of deceptive, unwise, or flippant oaths. On occasion God Himself swears oaths (such as in Luke 1:73, Hebrews 3:11, and Hebrews 6:13).

Do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath: James again echoed the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:34-37). The need to swear or make oaths, beyond a simple

and clear yes or no betrays the weakness of one's word. It demonstrates that there is not enough weight in one's own character to confirm their words. This lack of character will be exposed at the judgment seat of Christ. This motivates us all the more to prepare for that judgment by our speaking with integrity.