

Week 10 - Patience in Suffering

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[0 : 00] Well if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read.

James chapter 5, we're going to look at verses 7 down to the verse marked 11. We're going to leave out verse 12 this week and fit it in next week. James chapter 5 let's just read again at verse 7 and verse 8 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. You also be patient, establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

And so what we can see from verse 7 onwards is that James is he is starting to bring his letter to its conclusion. And as we said since the beginning of our study in the letter of James we are to consider it as a handbook to to Christian living. James's concern is that we apply the gospel in our lives and live out our Christian faith in a practical way.

And this handbook to Christian living was written for those who love Jesus and desire to live in submission to his word. This letter was written for us so that we would not only be hearers of God's word, that we would also be doers of God's word.

But as we know the original audience, the original hearers of this message, this letter, they were Christians who were young in their faith and they were experiencing persecution for their faith.

[1 : 58] And as persecuted Christians they had been dispersed and they had been driven out of their homes to live in cities, foreign cities, outside the land of Palestine. And because the church or these churches were all in their infancy and there was no real structures, there was no forms of discipleship, these young Christians they were living in this hostile environment, a hostile environment, an environment that was hostile to the gospel.

And because of a lack of discipleship it caused a lot of issues in the church. The young Christians they were surrounded by temptations that caused discrimination and gossip, backbiting, pride, jealousy, boasting, all these different issues.

But the root cause of all the problems was their immaturity. They needed to grow as Christians and they needed to mature in their faith. And so James writes to these Christians to encourage them and to say to them that living out your faith in a fallen world it's not an easy task.

And so James says you need to grow as a Christian. You need to persevere in your Christian faith. You need to be steadfast in your witness. And you need to be devoted in your love of Jesus and your love of his cause.

James says you need patience and you need prayer. And that's how James brings his letter to a conclusion. He speaks about patience and about prayer.

[3 : 31] James emphasizes the need for steadfastness and faithfulness. And you know what's interesting is that that's how James began his letter.

He began by writing to these struggling disciples who had been persecuted for their faith and constantly bombarded by all these temptations. James starts at the beginning of his letter and he says in chapter 1 count it all joy my brothers when you meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness or perseverance let it have its full effect that you may be perfect that you may persevere and be complete lacking in nothing.

And so when James opens his letter he began by encouraging and teaching these Christians to remain steadfast and persevere. And what we see at the end of his letter is that James returns to the same theme.

He concludes the same way he began by encouraging and teaching these Christians and us to remain steadfast in our faith and to persevere to the end.

And as I said God willing we'll see both this week and next week as we conclude our study in the letter of James what we'll see is that James highlights for us two characteristics that every Christian must possess.

[4 : 57] Two characteristics that we must possess in order to remain steadfast and persevere. And these two characteristics are patience and prayer.

Patience and prayer. And we can see that from the number of times James mentions these words patience and prayer. He mentions them so often in these closing verses.

And so in conclusion as we come to the conclusion of the letter James is going to encourage and teach us about patience in suffering and prayer through suffering.

Patience in suffering and prayer through suffering. And we'll consider patience in suffering this week and then God willing next week prayer through suffering.

And so I'd like us to just look at patience in suffering verses 7 to 11. And I'd like us just to consider this section under three headings. Three headings.

[5 : 54] Patient parousia I'll explain that in a minute. Patient prophets and patient promises. Patient parousia patient prophets and patient promises.

So if we look firstly at patient parousia look at verse 7 and 8. He says 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.

You also be patient establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Now the word parousia it's the Greek word for coming.

And when it's used in the New Testament it's always used in reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ. And James uses it twice in these verses in verses 7 and 8.

Because in verse 7 James says therefore brothers be patient for the parousia of the Lord. And then in verse 8 James emphasizes that our need to be patient and persevere and remain steadfast in our faith it's because the parousia of the Lord is at hand.

[7 : 09] It's drawing near he says. And what James is saying is that we need to live out our lives as Christians in light of the second coming.

Because he says when we do when we have an eye towards the parousia the second coming of Jesus James says that we will live out our lives with purpose and perseverance and passion towards the things of Christ and his church.

And what James is saying to us is my brothers and sisters in Christ yes there is suffering in this life yes there will be persecution there will be divisions and illness and heartache and sorrow and we will encounter these things because we live in a broken and fallen world.

But he says we must be patient. We must remain steadfast in our Christian faith and persevere to the end. Because we do not know he says when Jesus will come again.

We don't know when the parousia of our Lord will take place. And so we have to be passionate and persevering and patient.

[8 : 20] And you know if anyone stressed about the need to be faithful and have this eye towards the second coming of Christ it was Jesus himself. Because time and time again in the Gospels when we read them Jesus speaks about his parousia his second coming.

And Jesus speaks about the parousia both positively and negatively. He speaks about it negatively for the unconverted. He speaks about it to those who are uncommitted.

Who are not persevering in the faith and not looking to Jesus as their saviour. And Jesus reminds them as he does in Matthew 24 he says when the Son of man comes the Son will be darkened the moon will not give its light the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken but of that day and hour says Jesus no one knows not even the angels in heaven but my Father only.

And then Jesus goes on to say as it was in the days of Noah so will it also be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man for in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking marrying and giving in marriage and they did not know until the flood came and it took them all away.

And Jesus says so also will it be with the coming of the Son of Man. Watch therefore because you do not know at what hour your Lord is coming but know this that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come he would have watched he would have watched and not allowed the house to be broken into.

[10 : 03] Therefore he says be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you think not. And it's solemn words and I'm sure I've told you before the story about Andrew Bonar who was a free church minister during the 19th century that when one evening Andrew Bonar came down from the steps of his pulpit after preaching and he spoke with some of his elders at the bottom and Andrew Bonar he individually asked all his elders the same question do you think the Lord will come tonight?

Do you think the Lord will come tonight? Do you think the Lord will come tonight? And they all replied with the same answer I think not I think not I think not and Andrew Bonar reminded his elders of the words of Jesus by quoting Matthew 24 verse 44 therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as you think not the son of man come and for us my Christian friend Jesus repeatedly gives us this warning and he told us many parables in order to emphasize the seriousness of the parousia because Jesus told the parable as you know of the wise and the foolish virgins in which there were these wise women who had oil in their lamps and they were ready and waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom but there were also those who were foolish and they didn't have oil in their lamps they weren't ready they weren't prepared they weren't persevering to the end

Jesus also told the parable of the talents and he stressed that we're not to bury our talent we're not to bury the talent that the Lord has given to us to use in his kingdom because we are to invest our lives in the kingdom of God because when the master comes he will say to us or will he say to us well done thou good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy God and there's also the parable of the sheep and the goats and all these parables they're there to stress to us the seriousness of the second coming the sheep and the goats which the sheep they did everything for the Lord and they would be welcomed into the kingdom that was prepared for them but the goats who said that they well they said that they had plenty of time and they did plenty in the Lord's name but they actually did nothing the goats were told depart from me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels you know

Jesus doesn't mince his words and he certainly didn't mince them when it came to the second coming because he repeatedly said watch therefore watch therefore you do not know when the master is coming in the evening at midnight at the crowing of the rooster in the morning and he says lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping and Jesus says what I say to you I say to all watch watch and you know it's for this reason that James is stressing to us that we need to live our lives as Christians in light of the second coming we have to have an eye towards this this parousia and live out our Christian faith with purpose and perseverance and passion towards the things of Christ and his church and as we can see in verse 7 James gives us his own illustration on it all he gives the illustration of the farmer the farmer who went and prepared his ground and then he went out into his field and he sowed his seed he scatters the seed on the ground and it's a very natural illustration of patience because when the farmer sowed his seed in the morning it would look no different by the evening nothing would have changed he went out into the field in the morning sowed the seed and then when he looked at his field at the end of the day it hadn't changed at all the results weren't instant he had to be patient he had to wait and he had to wait upon the Lord he could do very little to affect the outcome of the crop except to pray and wait upon the

Lord to provide rain and for the farmer in Palestine his crop was completely dependent upon the rains the rains that would come in the late autumn and the early spring he couldn't do anything to make the sown seed make root or take root and produce the precious fruit of the earth he had to be faithful in sowing and he had to be faithful in praying and waiting upon the Lord to grant growth and increase and you know that's what James is telling us as the Lord's people we don't know when the precious fruit of new life and new birth and being born again we don't know when that will happen in people's lives we don't know when it's going to happen and how it's going to happen and with whom it's going to happen because just like the farmer's seed we don't know what's going on under the surface of the soil we don't know what's going on in someone's heart we just have to be faithful in our sowing of God's word in our sowing of the seed both in season and out of season we have to persevere in our

[15 : 44] Christian witness and we have to be patiently waiting upon the Lord in prayer and we have to pray for the rain to come to pray that the Lord would open the windows of heaven and shower his blessing upon us my friend we have to be faithful in our sowing we have to persevere in our witness we have to patiently pray as we were singing pray that Herman's dew would fall upon this dry parched land that's what we're singing in Psalm 133 Herman's dew that fell because it fell like rain as he says as Herman's dew the dew that doth on Zion hills descend for there the blessing God commands life that shall never end and so we're to have our eyes towards the parousia of Jesus we're to be watching and praying we're to be patient and persevering because Jesus could come at any time and that's what he actually says to us in the close of this book of Revelation the final word that

Jesus gives us in the last chapter of the Bible he says it three times behold I come quickly but you know this parousia the second coming of Jesus it should also be a great comfort to us we often view the second coming of Jesus as something that's negative because well it's the day of judgment and for the unconverted it will be something negative but for the Christian it will be vindication because of the second coming of Jesus King Jesus will right all wrongs he will end all injustice he will deliver his people from suffering whether that's persecution or physical suffering and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes which means that as Christians we should look forward to the day of the Lord to this parousia we should have a rise towards the Lord's coming watching and waiting being patient and persevering and that's how Paul encouraged the believers in

Thessalonica you remember in his first letter the end of chapter 4 Paul says to the Thessalonians the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of an archangel with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first then we who are alive will and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and thus shall we always be with the Lord and then Paul adds therefore comfort one another with these words so the parousias to be something of a comfort for the Christian that the Lord will bring an end to all things and you know that's how Jesus comforted his own disciples he reminded them that he was coming again you remember in John 14 in the upper room Jesus told the disciples that he has to go he has to go away and they couldn't understand why couldn't understand why the Lord has to go but Jesus says to them let not your heart be troubled you believe in God believe also in me in my father's house and many mansions if it were not so I would have told you

I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also and so my friend we're to be patient in suffering and we're to be patient in suffering as we await the parousia the second coming and we're to be patient by persevering and remaining steadfast in our faith but secondly we see that patience and suffering was exemplified by the prophets patience and suffering was exemplified by the prophets so we look secondly at patient prophets we've seen patient parousia but secondly patient prophets he says in verse 9 do not grumble against one another brothers so that you may not be judged behold the judges standing at the door as an example of suffering and patience brothers take the prophets who spoke in the name of the lord

James he begins this next section in verses 9 and 10 by talking about grumbling and speaking against one another and you know at first glance it may be difficult for us to understand where all this fits into the idea of being patient and suffering but when we think about it the times we often grumble and moan and complain is when we're facing difficult circumstances and we grumble to those closest to us or we grumble against those closest to us we take out all our frustration on our wife or our husband or a friend because we know them so well and we grumble against them and we even fall out with them not because of any problem in the relationship itself but because of pressures and stresses out with the relationship and these things get to us they frustrate us and they cause us to be uptight and maybe even grumpy with those around us well I'm like that in a way

[21 : 27] I don't know about you but you know we take it out on those closest to us and we grumble we moan and groan and we're grumpy because of all the pressures and stresses and strains of life whether they're pressures from work or frustration because of illness or difficulties with growing children or aging parents their financial worries or even even just tiredness they're all factors that play a part in our grumbling against those closest to us you know it seems so natural to think that James's original readers they were under the same or similar pressures but even more so because of their persecution and this grumbling which James mentions it relates just to what he was saying in chapter 3 about our tongue and our use of the tongue towards others but you know what's interesting about all this and how it all fits together is that we were talking about this last night the discipleship explored course and we were looking at Philippians chapter 4 where Paul says rejoice in the

Lord always again I say rejoice and Paul goes on to say let your reasonableness let your patience be known to everyone he says the Lord is at hand the Lord has drawn near the parousia is coming and Paul says do not be anxious about anything but in prayer but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God and what the presenter Barry Cooper was saying on the DVD last night was that we spend our lives worrying and we waste time fretting and with nervousness and sleeplessness and stress and we worry about so many things whether it's money or health or our looks or our jobs or security or our families or our futures and while we're worrying he says we're worrying about worrying and he says that we even use the frustrations and stresses and strains of life to excuse ourselves when we grumble against someone whether it's our husband or wife and well we grumble against them and we excuse ourselves by saying well

I couldn't help it I'm stressed I'm under a lot of pressure but Paul teaches us in Philippians 4 that we're to rejoice in the Lord always and that doesn't mean we're to have a smile on our face while we suffer it means that we're to look to the Lord and rejoice in the fact that he knows the way that we take he knows everything about our situation he knows all our circumstances and because he knows all our circumstances we can go to him in prayer with everything and you know we're never to view anything as too trivial for the Lord he's our father in heaven our heavenly father he knows everything about us and so we can talk to him about everything and anything and we're to bring everything to him in prayer and that's what we were saying last night about the beautiful hymn what a friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear and what a privilege it is to carry everything to

God in prayer and the hymn writer says oh what peace we often forfeit oh what needless pain we bear all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer have we trials and temptations is there trouble anywhere we should never be discouraged take it to the Lord in prayer he says can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share Jesus knows our every weakness take it to the Lord in prayer and so in order to guard against grumbling and stress he says we're to rejoice in the Lord always and bring every prayer and petition before him and I know that sounds so easy theoretically but it's so and we all know that it's so difficult in reality but you know this is what James is saying to us and that's what he said at the beginning of his letter about rejoicing count it all joy my brothers when you endure trials of various kinds and you know in order to illustrate to us those who patiently suffered and rejoiced in their suffering and remained steadfast and persevered and continued in prayer in order to illustrate it James says in verse 10 as an example of suffering and patience brothers take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord and you know it's an interesting illustration because we wouldn't immediately think about

Old Testament prophets as those who patiently suffered and rejoiced in their suffering they certainly spoke in the name of the Lord they all had the trademark phrase thus saith the Lord but we don't often think of them as those who suffered but they did and they suffered greatly in many different ways they suffered persecution from the Lord's covenant people because their role as prophets was to call the people back to serving the living and through God their role as prophets was to proclaim God's truth and to herald God's covenant and challenge the Lord's people when they have turned away from worshipping the Lord and turned to idols and and to false gods and you know sadly the story of the Old Testament it's a story of rebellion and idolatry because the Israelites they were always turning away from the Lord and they were always turning to idols and yet out of his grace and his love and his mercy the

[27 : 45] Lord sent prophet after prophet after prophet to his people and that and if they refused to repent and turn from the Lord that the Lord would bring judgment and the message that the prophets preached again and again was the solemn message judgment is coming judgment is coming repent and turn to the Lord because judgment is coming and that was the role of the prophets the role was to call the people back to realize the error of their ways and to repent and turn to the Lord and seek him with all their heart their role was to ensure that the Lord's people remained committed and that they were committed to loving honoring serving and worshiping the Lord and for that reason they suffered greatly they experienced opposition and even hatred and in some cases they were put to death and yet they patiently suffered because if we think of Isaiah just to take one example when Isaiah was called by the Lord to be a prophet and to speak to the Lord's people you'll remember in Isaiah chapter 6 beautiful chapter

Isaiah was given that heavenly vision a vision of the throne room of God and he says in the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple and above him stood the set of him each one it had six wings and with two he covered his face and with two they covered his feet and with two they flew and he Isaiah describes what was going on that they're calling one to the other and saying holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory and then Isaiah says that he heard the Lord saying about his wayward people to whom shall I send and who will go for us and Isaiah says here am I send me and the Lord says to Isaiah go and say to this people keep on hearing but do not understand and keep on seeing but do not perceive and then

Isaiah asks how long oh Lord how long oh Lord how long am I to keep sowing this seed how long am I to keep preaching this message of coming judgment how long am I to keep persevering persevering with them how long oh Lord how long and the Lord says until the cities lie waste without inhabitant and houses without people and the land is a desolate waste and the Lord removes people far away and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land and what the Lord sent to Isaiah was he was to keep preaching until the Lord would come in judgment and that's what James is telling us it was telling us in the first section we're to keep sowing the seed we're to keep and remain steadfast until the parousia until Jesus returns to judge the world we're to keep on being faithful and that's what Isaiah did he remained steadfast he remained faithful he persevered with the Lord's message and he continued to be patient in the midst of suffering and

Isaiah did suffer he suffered because he proclaimed the truth he suffered humiliation and shame you remember he had to walk around preaching naked for two years and he preached naked in order to show the Israelites that the Lord was going to come in judgment and strip them of everything they had and the Lord did that he drove them out of the promised land and they were exiled into Babylon they left with nothing they were stripped of everything but that wasn't before the Israelites hate before the Israelites killed Isaiah they hated Isaiah so much that they tied him down and they cut him in two he was sawn in two and that's only one example of the Lord's prophets suffering there were many prophets who suffered and many more who were killed and yet they all patiently suffered they rejoiced in their situation and they remain steadfast and persevere to the end and so as James is encouraging us and teaching us as Christians to remain steadfast in our faith and he's teaching us to persevere to the end and he says we're to be patient in suffering as we await the parousia and we're to be patient in suffering by following the example of the prophets but lastly he says lastly and hopefully briefly he says we're to be patient in suffering by clinging to the promises of God's word patient parousia patient prophets and then patient promises patient promises look at verse 11 he says behold we consider those blessed who remain 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 so James concludes this section about patience and suffering by emphasizing that those in the past who were patient in suffering and those who sought to be steadfast in their faith and persevere to the end

James says they were blessed they were blessed behold we consider those blessed who remain steadfast and of course James is referring to the prophets in the previous verse they are the example but it's safe to say that it wasn't just the prophets who were patient in suffering and sought to be steadfast in their faith and persevere to the end because James goes on to say in verse 11 he says you have heard of the steadfastness of job you've heard of the perseverance the patience the endurance of job and you've seen the purpose of the Lord and how the Lord is compassionate and merciful and job as we know he wasn't a prophet he was just an ordinary man who experienced extraordinary suffering because when we read the book of job we see that job lost everything in only 32 verses he lost his business he lost his livestock he lost his children he lost his health and then his wife told him curse God and die job lost everything in only 32 verses and in the book of job he spends the next 40 chapters trying to understand why and I'm sure I've said it before that that life can be like that sometimes life can change in a moment because in 32 verses in the narrative of your life your experience and what you know to be sure and to be secure in your life it can be turned upside down in a moment that message of bad news can change your life completely and like job you can spend the next 40 chapters of your life trying to come to terms with what happened and throughout those 40 chapters of 40 years you may be asking yourself why but as hard as it may be to try and understand the Lord's ways and the Lord's dealings with us

[35 : 44] James reminds us here that when we look at the life of job and all that he suffered and all that he endured as a faithful believer James says that we are made to see that the Lord is sovereign and he has a purpose in all things because as Isaiah said himself his ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts and James says that what job came to discover through all the awful tragedies of his life was that the Lord was compassionate and merciful what a discovery and you know I believe that the reason job discovered that the Lord was compassionate and merciful was because he was blessed he job was a blessed man and that's the position of every believer we are blessed men and women we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ and as I've said before the word blessed means to kneel it gives the illustration of someone kneeling before the king with their head bowed and their hand outstretched and they're receiving from the hand of the king what they know that they don't deserve and that's what grace is we receive what we don't deserve it's receiving from the hand of king Jesus what we don't deserve and my friend job was a blessed man we are blessed men and women because we receive from the hand of king Jesus every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ in other words we graciously receive all the great and precious promises of God's word we receive them all every single one of them is ours to claim and so what James is encouraging us and teaching us in this as he begins this closing section on being patient and suffering he says that we're not only to keep our eyes on the parousia the second coming we're not only to follow the example of the prophets but we're also to plead the precious promises of God's word which have all been graciously given to us by king Jesus and you know as you know yourself there are many great and precious promises in God's word many of them be strong and courageous do not be afraid do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you as I was with Moses so I will be with you

I will not leave you nor forsake you the eternal God is your refuge underneath are his everlasting arms God is our refuge and our strength and an ever present help in time of trouble he knows the way that I take when he has tried me I shall come forth as gold my grace is sufficient for you for my strength is made perfect in weakness there are so many great and precious promises and we are to read them and we are to plead them and we are to lead others to them that's our responsibility we're to read them plead them and lead others to them because as we patiently endure suffering in this life whatever that may be we're to remain steadfast in our faith and persevere to the end always looking to Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith so keep going may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray

O Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee that thou art the God who knows all that we go through in life that nothing is hidden from thee that everything has been seen by thee from even eternity past and we give thanks to thee that thou art the God who saw it then and thou art the God who sees it now and we bless thee and we praise thee that everything we go through in life is known to thee it has been written in thy book and all our days have been numbered by thee and that therefore we are able to come to thy throne of grace and we are able to find thy grace to help in time of need and help us Lord as thy people to keep pleading the precious promises to keep looking to Jesus to be patient in suffering to persevere to the end to keep our eyes firmly fixed upon Jesus and that we O Lord would have a faithful witness or that we would live our lives that lives that glorify thy name and that we would be the light of the world and the salt of the earth that we would be examples in our home and in our family and to those in our workplace and those in our community that they would see in us the beauty of Jesus the Christ the hope of glory that they would see in us this Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us

O Lord bind us together we pray help us to be faithful keep us for as we know and as we heard we cannot keep ourselves O Lord we cannot keep ourselves but that thou wouldest keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore go before us then we pray do us good take away our iniquity and receive us graciously for Jesus' sake Amen we shall conclude by singing in Psalm 37 Psalm 37 in the Scottish Psalter page 252 Psalm 37 we're singing from verse 3 down to the verse marked 7 set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food delight thyself in God he'll give thine heart's desire to thee thy way to God commit him trust it bring to pass shall he down to the verse marked 7 of Psalm 37 to God's praise set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good and so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily in the food delight thyself in God he'll give thine heart's be smart to thee thy way to God commit in trust it bring to pass shall be forth like new and like unto the light he shall thy righteousness display and he thy judgment shall bring forth like like noontide of the day rest in the Lord and patiently wait for him to not rest for him who prospering in his way success in sin doth care the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore

Amen