

Be Patient (James 5:1-11)

Expository Lessons from the Letter of James

I. Introduction and Review

- a. This is an extremely *practical letter* to help Christians who are striving to follow the way of life laid out by Jesus.
- b. The passage we will study today, from the first half of **James 5**, addresses the problems of the wealthy oppressing the poor among the Christians, and also the importance of having patience.
 - i. While it might have been easier to treat these two topics in two separate messages, it seems to me that James is making a connection between these two issues. For that reason, we will address both issues in a single lesson.
 - ii. Once again, as we have done throughout this series, we will consider the great extent to which James' teachings are reinforcing and applying *things that Jesus taught* in the gospels.

II. James Rebukes the Rich

- a. Read **James 5:1-6**.
- b. James has some very hard things to say to the rich, who are headed for destruction.
 - i. **Question:** Is James addressing *wealthy Christians* here, or is he speaking to *wealthy people in the world who are oppressing the Christians*?
 - 1. Characteristics of these rich people include:
 - a. They have heaped up gold and silver for themselves, and wear expensive garments.
 - b. They have defrauded those working for them in their fields.
 - c. They have lived in pleasure and luxury.
 - d. They have condemned and even *murdered* the just (righteous ones), who did not resist their abuse.

2. I realize that Christians have disagreed whether James is addressing unbelieving wealthy people or wealthy Christians. However, the condemnation and charges are so extreme that my own opinion is that he is addressing the situation with unbelieving wealthy people oppressing poorer Christians.
 - a. Notice the “therefore” that James uses here to transition to the call for patience on the part of Christians. He calls for the Christians to exhibit patience, since the Lord, in the end, will make all things right.
 - b. Perhaps that supports the idea that James is contrasting the *wealthy pagans who are doing the exploiting*, versus the *poorer Christian workers who are being exploited*.
- c. We have already seen James address issues related to wealth in prior passages, from **James chapters 1-4**. For example:
 - i. “Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.” (**James 1:9–11**, NKJV)
 1. The rich man’s glory in his pursuits will fade quickly, like the flower.
 - ii. “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” (**James 2:5–7**, NKJV)
 1. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith; the rich have oppressed the poor.
 - iii. “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” (**James 4:13–14**, NKJV)
 1. Here he addresses rich businessmen who are boasting about their plans.
- d. Recall that Jesus also had stern warnings to the rich, in the gospels.

- i. “But *woe to you who are rich*, For you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.” (**Luke 6:24–26**, NKJV)
- ii. From Parable of the Sower, regarding the third soil.
 1. “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are *choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life*, and bring no fruit to maturity.” (**Luke 8:14**, NKJV)
- iii. Jesus’ response after someone complains that his brother won’t divide their inheritance. Read **Luke 12:13-34**.
 1. “...Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (**Luke 12:33–34**, NKJV)
 2. This is Jesus’ ‘investment advice’!
- iv. Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, in **Luke 16:19-31**.
- v. Story of the Rich Young Ruler, in **Luke 18:18-30**.
- vi. Story of Zacchaeus, the rich chief tax collector who decided to follow Jesus, in **Luke 19:1-10**.
 1. “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham....’” (**Luke 19:8–9**, NKJV)
- vii. Story of the Sheep and Goats, on the Day of Judgment, in **Matthew 25:31-46**.
 1. “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

2. "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'" **(Matthew 25:41-45, NKJV)**
- e. Paul also gave stern warnings regarding the dangers of wealth.
 - i. "*Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" **(1 Timothy 6:6-10, NKJV)**
 1. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It has led to the destruction of many.
 - ii. "*Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*" **(1 Timothy 6:17-19, NKJV)**
 1. The rich are commanded to be generous toward the poor, to be rich in good works.
 - f. While the New Testament warnings on the dangers of wealth are so clear and consistent, many Christians have managed to completely miss this teaching. Problems I have seen with Christians and even with churches include:
 - i. Seeing wealth as a sign of God's favor.
 - ii. Using Old Testament principles related to money (hard work, avoiding debt, saving, discipline, etc.) as a means to gain financial prosperity.
 1. Dave Ramsey is perhaps the best-known example of someone who is known for this approach.
 2. He has a saying, "Live like no one else now [*meaning: stay out of debt, live below your means, save and invest*] so that you can

live like no one else later on [*meaning: end up being wealthier than your peers*].”

- a. Some churches even use this type of approach [using Old Testament principles to become wealthy] as a method of evangelistic outreach into their communities!
- iii. Adopting the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’, falsely telling people that the Lord wants to bless them financially, and He will do so if they seek Him (or if they contribute money to the church).
- iv. Churches showing partiality toward the wealthy, whereby they won’t challenge their wealthy members on obvious sin (especially if they give a lot of money to the church).
- g. However, living for pleasure and selfish consumption will send us to our destruction!
- h. Others in our society have recognized this pattern called out by James (the selfish rich oppressing the poor), but propose a different solution.
 - i. Marxism/socialism has been gaining popularity recently in many parts of the U.S.
 - ii. Their answer: workers need to rise up and seize the means of production. Abolish private property. The popular motto of many Marxists is: “[*Take by force*] from each according to his ability, [*and redistribute*] to each according to his need.”
 - iii. Marxist attempts to correct financial inequality and oppression have not gone well. The result of many attempts to implement Marxist principles has included mass murder, starvation, loss of basic freedoms, and widespread persecution of Christians.
 - 1. Tens of millions died in the 20th century, as the fruit of Marxist takeovers in several countries.
 - iv. **Questions:** Are we seeing the beginning of that in this country? Could it happen following social unrest from an unpopular war and/or economic collapse?
 - 1. While I certainly hope we don’t see Marxists or socialists take over the U.S., it could happen in the future. Their ideas have become rather popular among those under the age of forty, especially in the more left-leaning parts of the country.
- v. Jesus and the apostles such as James recognized similar problems in their society (wealthy oppressing the poor and those who were

working for the rich). However, the solution advocated by Jesus and the apostles was very different from what the socialists are proposing!

1. Jesus and the apostles encouraged us to work hard and *voluntarily* give a portion of our property to the poor out of love. And they called those suffering to endure patiently in the face of oppression, realizing that *only in the end* would we see justice fully prevail.

III. James Calls the Christians to be Patient

a. Read **James 5:9-11**.

- i. His solution to the problem (of suffering, being oppressed, being treated unjustly): James tells the Christians to “be patient until the coming of the Lord.”
- ii. He describes the coming of Jesus as being “at hand.”
- iii. He provides three examples of patience:
 1. The hard-working farmer, who plants the seeds and then has to *wait* for the early and later rains.
 2. The Old Testament prophets, who proclaimed the word of the Lord but had to suffer and *persevere with patience*. They were blessed through their endurance.
 - a. The Hebrew writer says of these heroes of faith (a picture of what it looks like to *live by faith*):
 - b. “...Others were *tortured*, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of *mockings and scourgings*, yes, and of *chains and imprisonment*. They were *stoned*, they were *sawn in two*, were *tempted*, were *slain with the sword*. They wandered about in *sheepskins and goatskins*, being *destitute, afflicted, tormented*—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in *deserts and mountains, in dens and caves* of the earth.” (**Hebrews 11:35–38**, NKJV)
 3. The story of Job, who endured extraordinary suffering and trials. However, in the end, he lived to see deliverance from the Lord.

- iv. In light of this, James also admonishes the Christians not to grumble against one another (even when you are being treated unjustly), *or they will be condemned.*

1. **Question:** Have you been guilty of grumbling or complaining about other Christians?

- a. If you are aware of a sin in the life of a brother or sister, you need to go straight to them. If they don't listen, you then bring someone else along, just as Jesus explained in **Matthew 18:15-19.**

- i. If the sin involves a child, especially one who is not a baptized Christian, you need to go to the child's parent.

- ii. **Question:** If you see a problem with how the church is led, is it ok to grumble to others about it? Who do you need to talk to, and who do you need to NOT talk to?

- b. In matters like these, please discern whether the thing you are concerned about is *clearly a sin* (in light of the Scriptures), versus being merely *something you personally don't like.*

- c. I have seen too many problems in this area among us. Please consider whether this has been a problem for you.

- i. If you see yourself guilty here, repent, stop doing it, and admonish anyone who may grumble to you about others.

IV. What Biblical Patience Is, and Why It Is So Important

- a. The Greek root word translated (in the NKJV) here as "be patient" or "patience" appears four times in the passage we just read. Where used as a verb, the Greek word is "makrothumeo/μακροθυμέω," and where used as a noun, it is "makrothumia/μακροθυμία."

- i. It means to have patience, to wait, to bear patiently, to forbear, or (especially of God) to be slow to anger.

- ii. It comes from two Greek words that convey the idea of one's anger being far off, or slow to anger. (The *opposite* would be hot-headed, quick to anger, impatient or highly reactive.)

- b. Many of us struggle with impatience.
 - i. For example:
 - 1. A child who can't wait to go somewhere enjoyable, such as to a party or a playground.
 - 2. Someone who gets agitated while sitting in traffic.
 - 3. Someone who has a short attention span. Someone who cuts other people off when speaking, because they can't wait to hear the rest of what the others are saying.
 - 4. Someone who gets quickly or easily irritated.
 - ii. While the above may be annoying habits, the kind of "long suffering" character that God Himself has, and that James is calling us to have, is a *much deeper matter*.
- c. James is speaking here about people who are willing to be longsuffering, to bear a very challenging situation over an extended period of time in a patient, persevering way, taking on ourselves an attribute not only of the heroes of the faith of the past, but a foundational characteristic of God Himself.
 - i. God is slow to anger.
 - 1. In **Exodus 33-34**, Moses asked to reveal Himself to him. The Lord responded that no man could see His face and live; however, the Lord would pass before him and reveal His glory.
 - 2. Read **Exodus 34:5-8**.
 - a. The Lord reveals His nature as: "The Lord God, compassionate, merciful and *longsuffering*..."
 - b. God is slow to anger.
 - 3. David recounted this in **Psalms 102/103**.
 - a. Read **Psalms 102/103: 7-9**.
 - b. He reveals His *longsuffering character* to those who fear Him and keep His covenant and obey His commandments, as explained in **Psalms 102/103:17-18**.
 - 4. Jonah lamented this in **Jonah 4:2**.

- a. Jonah said, expressing his disappointment that the Lord did not destroy Nineveh: “I *knew* you to be compassionate and merciful, *longsuffering* and abundant in mercy.”
- ii. That God is *by nature* slow to anger is incredibly important for us.
 - 1. He does get angry, but also does so slowly, to give us an opportunity to repent (as He did to the people of Nineveh). He is just, but does not want to destroy anyone.
 - 2. Jesus tells the church in Thyatira, in **Revelation 2:21**, that He had given Jezebel “time to repent of her sexual immorality,” yet she would not repent. Unless she and those with her repented, He “who searches the minds and hearts” would repay them with death.
 - 3. God has given each of us time to repent. However, we don’t know how long that time will be. At some point, either through death or His Second Coming, the door will be closed.
- d. To me, the classic example of someone who did NOT show patience (enduring and remaining faithful in the face of a challenging situation) is King Saul. Consider the episode that cost him the kingdom.
 - i. Read **1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms) 13:6-13**.
 - 1. Saul was waiting, following instructions from Samuel the priest. However, rather than continue waiting, he became impatient and “took matters into his own hands”, offering the burnt offering rather than continuing to wait until the priest arrived, as promised.
 - 2. As a result, the Lord took the kingdom away from Saul and gave it instead to a man after His own heart (David).
 - ii. This is burned into my mind as the classic picture of a man of faith who was chosen by God, who was brought down *because he did not have patient endurance. He took matters into his own hands rather than waiting* for the promised priest (who seemed to be delayed) to show up.
- e. This story from the life of Saul reminds me of another passage in the Old Testament where *someone else* is promised to come, who would appear to be delayed in his coming.
 - i. Read **Habakkuk 2:1-4**, from a translation based on the LXX text.

1. This prophecy was given about 600 years before the birth of Jesus.
2. He is described here as “the one who is coming”. We are instructed to “wait for Him”. The righteous who wait for Him are those who are “living by faith” and not shrinking back.
3. In **Hebrews 10**, this passage is recalled (based on the LXX reading).
 - a. “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” (**Hebrews 10:35–39**, NKJV)
 - i. “The one coming” refers to Jesus.
 - ii. The “coming” Habakkuk speaks of is referring to His *Second Coming*, when all will be judged, on the Last Day.
 - iii. The challenge for us is to wait for Him, to patiently persevere, to “not shrink back” but instead to “live by faith.” (Saving faith is a continuing way of life, not just the belief of one instant.)
- f. Jesus spoke of his Second Coming and how some would be tempted to backslide due to the apparent delay in His return. He explains here what He expects faithful servants to do, to be prepared for His return.
 - i. “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (**Matthew 24:45–51**, NKJV)

1. Jesus told us in advance that He would be coming back, and that some of His servants would think he was taking too long, leading them to abuse (rather than take care of) their fellow servants, and get involved in sins of the flesh like drunkenness.
- g. Peter addressed the same matter.
- i. Read **2 Peter 1:1-15**.
 1. The Lord will keep His promise. He is coming back. Be prepared.
 2. Some will scoff at the idea that He is returning, based on the apparent delay.
 - a. However, with the Lord, “a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”
 - b. The delay is because God is *longsuffering* toward us, desiring to give all an opportunity to repent.
 - ii. Peter then says that Paul wrote the same thing regarding the longsuffering of God leading to our salvation.
 1. “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that *the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation*—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you....” (**2 Peter 3:14-15**, NKJV)
 - a. Paul talks about the Second Coming and the end times quite a bit in his letters.
 - b. For example, consider **1 Thessalonians 4-5** and **2 Thessalonians 1-2**.
 - iii. Jesus spoke a great deal about His Second Coming and the events surrounding that in **Matthew 24**. He admonished us:
 1. “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (**Matthew 24:12-14**, NKJV)

V. Conclusion

- a. James reminds the poor Christians who are being oppressed by the wealthy (whether this refers to unbelievers or to wicked believers):
 - i. Don't give in to the seductive dangers of living for money, pleasure, and comfort.
 - ii. The Scriptures are FULL of warnings against that. Treat wealth as high-voltage electricity: something that is inherently dangerous to us.
- b. For those facing challenges of many types in this life, we need to have the character of patient endurance. Being longsuffering.
 - i. This is embedded in the nature of God. Important to see Him as He has revealed Himself to us through Moses and David.
 - ii. It is his longsuffering that gives us time to repent. Don't squander that time. No guarantee of how much time we have.
- c. Imitate God and embrace the character of patient endurance in righteousness, being longsuffering, realizing that only at the end will Jesus make everything right and just for all of those being oppressed. But do what we can to show them the love of God, as we are able.
 - i. Do not grumble against one another!
- d. Be prepared. Take to heart the warnings of **Habakkuk**, the writer of **Hebrews**, Peter, Paul and Jesus. Endure and persevere in righteousness to the very end. Do not become weary. This demonstrates the faith that pleases God. Think of the examples of the patient farmer, Job and the prophets as examples to follow, to encourage us.