



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

“Waiting for the Light to Shine”

James 5:7-11

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Introduction

1. I don't recall a Christian school choral group I've sung with or heard who did not include some spirituals in their repertoire. Usually, they are favorites and they are a joy to sing. But I don't think their style fully explains their appeal. Their themes are forward looking, even when the tempo is slower. They look heavenward, to a time of *deliverance*. For example:

“Ain'ta That Good News” – “I got a crown up in'a that Kingdom // Ain'ta that'a good news // I got a crown up in'a that Kingdom // Ain'ta that'a good news // I'm gonna lay down this world // Gonna shoulder up my cross // Gonna take it home to my Jesus // Ain'ta that'a good news.”

“Soon-A Will Be Done” – “Soon-a will be done-a with the troubles of the world // The troubles of the world // The troubles of the world // Soon-a will be done-a with the troubles of the world // Goin' home to live with God /// No more weepin' and a wailin' // No more weepin' and a wailin' // No more weepin' and a wailin' // I'm goin' to live with God.”¹

2. They are songs of the oppressed, borne in the fields where slaves and share croppers toiled. With nothing to hope for here, they longed for a better place.
3. They probably approximate the situation of James's readers better than anything we know.
 - a. They were oppressed by rich landowners who lived without regard to the judgment.
 - b. But, James says, judgment also awaited his “brothers” (5:7, 9, 10) who were victims of the trials visited on them by the greedy rich. They were to act accordingly (7-11).

Body

- I. Action and Reason (7).

A. Verse 7 shows the connection between this section and vv. 1-6.

1. The connector “therefore” (οὖν, *oun*) and address to “brothers” (ἀδελφοί, *adelphoi*) shows that this section is the response the church was to make to vv. 1-6.
2. But, the theme of the “coming of the Lord” shows it even more: the same judgment that awaited the greedy rich would be welcome relief for the faithful.

¹ https://www.negrospirituall.com/songs/ain_t_that_good_news.htm; https://www.negrospirituall.com/songs/soon_a_will_be_done.htm. Accessed January 17, 2016.

- B. The “coming of the Lord” (τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου, *tēs parousias tou kyriou*) “quickly took on the fixed meaning of Jesus’ return in glory and as judge.”²
1. Secular Greek used the word to refer “to the ‘arrival’ of a king or dignitary.”³
 2. For Christians, it quickly became a word of anticipation, as James shows.
 3. They can find comfort only in knowing the “Lord of hosts” (v. 4) brings justice.
- C. So, James commands them to “be patient” (Μακροθυμήσατε, *Makrothymēsate*, aorist imperative) “until the coming of the Lord.”
1. “Patience”⁴ points to the idea of active perseverance, even when persecuted.
 2. Its place in our text serves to tell the readers to leave judgment to God and not presume to take matters into their own hands.⁵
 3. No timetable is given for this judgment; they were to “be patient . . . until,” the latter word (ἕως, *heōs*) “suggesting the idea of a goal as well as a time period” (Moo, 222).
- D. The command to patience requires great faith, as James’s illustration shows.
1. Drawing on a reality those at the eastern end of the Mediterranean would have easily understood, James reminds his readers that God works in his own time.
 - a) “The early rains normally lasted from mid-October to mid-November, while the late rains spanned key portions of March and April. Thus the two main harvest (and planting) seasons came in the fall and spring” (Blomberg & Kamell, 227).
 - b) The phrase “early and later rains” was used in the OT in contexts affirming the Lord’s faithfulness (Deut. 11:14; Jer. 5:24; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech. 10:1) (Moo, 223); James calls for patience that stems from trust in the Lord’s care.
 2. That trust was needed is seen in further analysis of the figure for, once the farmers plant their fields, “they can do nothing to *make* their crops grow and produce their fruit” (Blomberg & Kamell, 226).
 3. That being true, the fruit that eventually grew would be indeed “precious” (τίμιον, *timion*), a word usually reserved in Scripture for jewels and crowns.⁶
 4. The point is clear: no matter how severely tried, “we cannot compel Christ to return according to any timetable other than God’s” (Blomberg & Kamell, 227).
 5. But, we can engage in kingdom work, as v. 8 reminds us.

II. Instruction and Motivation (8).

- A. James repeats the command of v. 7: “You also, be patient,” but also adds instruction that tells them how to be patient and supplies motivation for doing so.
- B. They are to “establish their hearts” (στηρίξατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, *stērixate tas kardias hymōn*), another command.
1. “Stand firm” (NIV) is the idea, natural in light of what a farmer would have had to do as he waited for his harvest to ripen.

² Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 226.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, 221.

⁴ This word will be studied more closely in comparison with “endurance” in the next sermon in this series, “Lord, Give Me Patience.”

⁵ Although they could call for a different way, as suggested in v. 10. See Blomberg & Kamell, 226; Moo, 222; and Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 182.

⁶ Blomberg & Kamell, 227, citing Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 313.

2. The LXX used the word in texts that referred to gaining physical strength for a journey (Judg. 19:5, 8; Psa. 103:15), for courage that came from trusting the Lord (Psa. 111:8), or for firming up one’s intention (Sirach 6:37; 22:16; cf. 1 Thess. 3:13) (Blomberg & Kamell, 227).
 3. Other NT texts endorse spiritual firmness (Luke 22:32; Rom. 1:11; 16:25; 1 Thess. 3:2; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 3:2) (Moo, 223).
 4. We see a call for believers to “fortify themselves for the struggle against sin and with difficult circumstances” (Moo, 223).
- C. The motivation for faithfulness is “because (ὅτι, *hoti*) the coming of the Lord is near.”
1. The perspective is a spiritual one that assumes “the last days” (cf. 5:3) have begun, but also that no announcement of their duration has been made.
 2. The timetable is God’s, in light of eternity (cf. Psa. 90:4) (see Blomberg & Kamell, 228), the expectation that we are to persevere because he could come at any time.⁷

III. Reaction: How To Live in Light of the Lord’s Coming.

- A. Verses 9-11 show more, but from what we have seen, we can suggest three things here.
1. We must get our priorities right, refusing to “act as though judgment remains far off” (Blomberg & Kamell, 228); instead, like our ancient brothers and sisters, we should live as people who expect the Lord’s coming any time (Moo, 224).
 2. We must be patient and let God work out the time, but also judgment for the injustices we see and experience (cf. Rom. 12:19).
 3. Like the prophets who in meeting injustice “spoke in the name of the Lord” (10), “we must busy ourselves with kingdom work,” doing all we can to see God’s purposes realized in our world (Blomberg & Kammell, 227).

Conclusion

1. I’ve never seen the play, but love the songs Roger Miller composed for the musical, *Big River*, a retelling of the Huck Finn story. The music depicts the longing to be free so typical of slaves in that or any era. Some of the songs have the feel of a spiritual as when part of the cast sings of “crossing to the other side” where “Jesus will be there to meet me.” Or when they sing, “How blest we are as children of a God so good and true.”
2. Those people with their longing are reaching toward what Huck Finn is struggling to find – and sings about twice. His life, he says, has been “undirected” and “cloudy,” spent “in the darkness until now.” But, he clings to hope, “waitin’ for the light to shine.”⁸
3. James reminds us that the Light has been shining and will one day come to reward the faithful who endure the injustices that attack God’s elect. His counsel remains: “Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

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⁷ I will address the matter of how a twenty-century delay fits the idea of “nearness” in the sermon, “He Stands Just Outside the Door” (James 5:8-9).

⁸ <http://www.allmusicals.com/b/bigriver.htm>. Accessed November 30, 2011.