



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

"Lord, Give Me Patience"

James 5:9-11

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Introduction

1. In the abstract, or when things are going well, Psalm 37:1-4 sounds almost easy.
 - a. But, what if I am "the righteous" against whom "the wicked plots" (v. 12)? "The poor and the needy" oppressors don't ignore, but seek "to bring down" (v. 14)?
 - b. Is it not understandable if I envy the prosperous man who seems to have it all at my expense (v. 7)? Am I really expected to "be still before the Lord" (v. 7), to "refrain from anger and forsake wrath!" (v. 8)?¹
 - c. That teaching may have felt as old and far removed to James's readers as his words can feel to us. Both told people to be patient (Psa. 37:7) as they endured ongoing oppression.
2. James told his readers to take comfort from the promise of the Lord's coming (5:7-11).
 - a. "Brothers" (7, 9-10) were victims of wage fraud perpetrated by rich landowners (1-6).
 - b. His response: "Be patient" (vv. 7, 8), "establish your hearts," i.e., remain faithful.
 - c. How long? "Until the coming of the Lord."
 - d. Upon what basis were they to remain patient? Because they could be assured that "the coming of the Lord is at hand."
3. Having looked at lessons from vv. 7-8 including a call to right priorities, letting God work in his own time and ways, and remaining faithfully busy in kingdom work, we are ready to look at vv. 9-11 to see what it means to be patient and steadfast.

Body

I. A Concern for Patience.

- A. In five verses, James uses the words "patient" (4) and "steadfast" (2) six times.
 1. "Patient" (the verb three times, the noun once)² is used first and most.
 - a) The Hebrew background has at its heart the idea of "long nose."
 - b) Prov. 25:15 - "With patience (בְּאַרְךָ אֲפִים, *berek appayim*) a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone."

¹ See Douglas Moo who discusses Psalm 37 as "one of the clearest examples" in "a very widespread biblical pattern" where poor righteous people are exhorted to remain patiently faithful as they were oppressed by unrighteous rich. (Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, 220-221.)

² μακροθυμέω, *makrothymēō*; μακροθυμία, *makrothymia*.

- (1) נָסָה, “‘ap. Nostril, face, anger. ... By the act of breathing, emotions can be expressed. Perhaps it was observed that the nose dilates in anger. God is said to be “erek’appayim’ (lit. ‘long of anger,’ i.e. long before getting angry) in such passages as Exo 34:6; Num 14:18; Psa 86:15; Neh 9:17. The thought is that God takes a long, deep breath as he holds his anger in abeyance, A ruler is said to be persuaded by a display of forbearance, patience, i.e. ‘the long of breath’ (Prov 25:15).³
 - (2) Generally, it “denot[es] the longsuffering attitude we are to adopt toward other people (1 Cor. 13:4; Eph. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:14), . . .” (Moo, 222).
 - c) “Steadfast” (endure, persevere)⁴ “refers to steadfastness and perseverance ‘under’ certain circumstances, and also to remaining expectant in the face of passing time.”⁵ It characterized “the strong, determined fortitude with which we need to face difficult circumstances (Rom. 8:25; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2 Thess. 1:4)” (Moo, 222).
 - d) To simplify, “we are *patient* with people and *endure* difficulties” (Moo, 222).
 - e) But, while partially true here, “this distinction does not appear to apply very neatly to James’s use of these two word-groups in this paragraph” (Moo, 222).
- B. So, patient endurance (or enduring with patience) is the theme of 5:7-11, a key to Christian living and anticipation of “the coming of the Lord,” and tested in real life.
- II. A Case of Failed Patience (5:9).
- A. In what at first seems to be an aside, James again warns of sins of speech (see 4:11-12).
1. “Grumble” (στενάζω, *stenazō*) refers to groaning or sighing [or “whining” - Blomberg & Kamell, 228] (Mark 7:34; Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4; Heb. 13:17).
 2. No specific reason for grumbling appears,⁶ but it was “against one another” (κατ’ ἀλλήλων, *kat’ allēlōn*), a problem that rings true to our experience.
- B. So, James recalls what we might call “the other side” of judgment.
1. The “brothers” should avoid putting themselves in a position to face the same kind of reckoning as their tormentors (5:1-6).
 2. “The Judge is standing at the door,” a figure that both warns and reminds us of the comfort of the Lord’s coming “The coming Lord is also the judge of the Christian.”⁷

³ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), BibleWorks, v.10. W. H. Hollander adds, “The Hebrew expression that stands behind it [in the LXX] in most instances is ‘erek’appayim, ‘the delay of [the outbreak of] wrath.’” (“μακροθυμία, ας, ή *makrothymia* patience, forbearance,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, 2:380.)

⁴ ὑπομένω, *hypomenō*; ὑπομονή, *hypomonē*.

⁵ W. Radl, “ὑπομονή, ής, ή, *hypomonē* perseverance, patience; expectation,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider, 3:405

⁶ “Perhaps they project their frustrations at the landlords onto each other. Or perhaps they disagree on how they ought to deal with the oppression and the different factions complain about each other in anger. Maybe they are blaming one another for the problems they are facing as a congregation, or maybe they are accusing each other to avoid problems themselves.” (Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 228.)

⁷ Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 185.

III. Models of Patience to Imitate.

A. There are the prophets (5:10).

1. The phrase that summarizes the prophets' experience is probably best translated as in the ESV, NASB, i.e., “suffering and patience” (τῆς κακοπαθείας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας, *tēs kakopathias kai tēs makrothymias*).⁸
 - a) It's comprehensive idea: like the readers, the prophets suffered; like James hopes the readers will do, the prophets responded with patience.
 - b) Prophets like Jeremiah, who suffered at the hands of both pagans and Israelites, come to mind; so does Isaiah whom Jewish tradition asserted died as a martyr by being sawn in two (cf. Heb. 11:37).
 - c) “Doing God's will, James is suggesting, will often lead to suffering. What is needed is a willingness to bear up under the suffering, maintaining spiritual integrity and waiting patiently for the Lord himself to intervene to transform the situation” (Moo, 227).
2. This did not mean the prophets ignored evil: they “spoke in the name of the Lord.”
 - a) Upon reflection, we know prophetic speaking “involved rhetoric denouncing injustice, even when the perpetrator was the king. They always, however, stopped short of violent reprisal or of inciting revolution.”⁹
 - b) The prophetic model, then, is what might be called “militant patience,” waiting on the Lord's coming, but also actively working for his reign and denouncing what does not harmonize with his reign.¹⁰

B. There is also Job.

1. Recalling a tendency to “consider blessed those who remained steadfast,” James cites the case of Job whose “steadfastness” revealed “the purpose (τέλος, *telos*) of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”
2. Job's example is somewhat complicated, owing to the common misunderstandings of “blessedness” and “patience” (cf. KJV, ASV), and other accounts of Job's story.
 - a) “Blessed” is not the same as “happy,” various translations today notwithstanding. “The latter speaks to the state of our emotions; the former to the objective state of our relationship with God” (Moo, 227). Cf. Jas. 1:12.
 - b) The same word group (ὑπομονή, *hypomonē*) is used for the blessed who were “steadfast” and for the “steadfastness” of Job.
 - c) “Second Temple Jewish literature expands on the suffering of Job, claiming that it lasted for many years before God restored him, so that he becomes the prime exemplar of endurance” (Blomberg & Kamell, 229).
 - (1) *The Testament of Job* speaks of Job as “being in all endurance” (ὑπομονή) (1:5), and later speaks of Satan as having been with Job for “three years” as the basis for encouraging his “children [to] be patient” (μακροθυμέω, *makrothymeō*) (27:6-7).

⁸ See the discussion in Moo, 226-227; but also in Blomberg & Kamell, 229.

⁹ Blomberg & Kamell, 229, citing Christopher Church, “James,” in *Hebrews-James*, ed. Edgar V. McKnight and Christopher Church, 407.

¹⁰ Ibid., 226, citing Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James*, 43-46.

- (2) Elsewhere, he exhorts, "But let us be patient (μακροθυμέω) in everything" (26:5).
- d) But, even the canonical book of Job points to his endurance: he did complain, and certainly questioned, but "he never abandoned his faith" (Moo, 229).
3. Yes, the Lord ultimately fulfilled his "purpose" and showed compassion and mercy.
- C. The point is clear: however long it takes, God's history is that he *will* come and intervene. "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord" (5:7).

Conclusion

1. That, of course, in the challenge. We tend to want what we want – including relief – right now, a tendency made worse by our high speed culture. Too many of us are like the adage where the man prays, "Lord, give me patience – right now!"
2. James reminds us that patience means time and that it is often developed by what we endure. But, he assures us the Lord *is* coming and will reward our faithfulness. We can live with that.

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