

The Patient and Steadfast Ministry of God's People

One of the injustices of the first-century world that the first Christians lived in is that there was a massive imbalance of wealth. The wealthy had all the power and control, and the working class could do little to improve their position, lived in great poverty and under great oppression. In our world today, in the US, there is a lot of opportunity to work hard and climb up the social ladder. Our country is full of stories of people whose families came here as poor immigrants and became wealthy and well-off through hard work and the opportunities that exist here. This is one of the reasons why so many people want to come into this country, but that's a unique scenario in human history. Most people live, or have lived, in a scenario closer to 1st-century Israel where the rich oppress the poor and use them to increase their wealth. This is an injustice in our world. I'm not saying that everyone should have the same amount of stuff, regardless of how much, or how little, they do to contribute to society. I'm saying that a society in which the rich and elite can use and abuse the poor to get richer because the poor have no power to stop them is an injustice. And that is the natural result of the sin inside our human hearts, and anywhere that does not exist (such as America) is a result of the grace of God.

Injustices may vary from place to place or from time to time, but injustices always exist. When I think of the injustices that are a stain on our modern world, I think of abortion and sex trafficking. When it comes to people unjustly wielding power over people weaker than them, these two come to the forefront of my mind. The murder of helpless babies through abortion and the abuse of poor and powerless human beings through sex trafficking are two ENORMOUS injustices in our world, and such injustices deserve divine wrath.

That's exactly the message of James 5. James writes in v.1-6 that these rich oppressors that have fattened their wallets through oppressing the poor have also fattened their hearts for the slaughter, which is his way of saying that divine wrath is being stored up against them and all who unjustly use their power to harm others for their own personal gain or pleasure.

Those are cultural injustices, but there are also personal injustices and these will also face divine wrath. This is true because **God hates injustice and will right every wrong in the world!**

There is evidence of this all throughout the Bible, but I don't want to spend our time today looking at that because we need to get to our text. However, let me briefly mention that he has two ways of doing this. The first way is the Cross, which happened at the first coming of Christ, and is His offer of forgiveness and reconciliation to us for all of the ways we have sinned and even participated in injustice. The other way is the judgement that will come when Christ comes a second time. At that point, He will right every wrong by condemning and punishing all the unrepentant/unsaved people who are alive, and even those who have already died. All who have rejected His offer of mercy through the Cross will receive judgement for every wrong thing

they have done. He will also, at that time, abolish the systems of sin and injustice that presently exist and operate in our world.

So, in light of this, let's look at our text.

James 5:7-11

⁷ 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. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained 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, in light of the injustices we live with and in light of God's certain judgment of all such injustices, what does James instruct us to do???

First of all, be patient.

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

What should be our response to the challenges of living in such an unjust world? Patience. Patience, because of a confidence in how this is going to end. We are certain that Jesus will make all things right. We see the BIG PICTURE. We know that this is not the whole story.

God will avenge the aborted children and the enslaved sex worker. He will judge the oppressors and those who have fattened their wallets by fraudulent abuse of their workers. Isn't that why James wrote verses 1-6? James didn't primarily write to condemn the rich oppressors. They likely never heard these words. He wrote to remind the Christians that God will judge justly and punish those who have not repented of their sins against Him and against man.

James 5:4 ⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

Revelation 22:12-13

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Be patient, therefore.

I hate movies that end without justice. At some point, it became popular to write stories that don't end well. I think this is because that seems authentic to us. We are used to seeing things not work out, and we've become used to seeing the bad guys win, or someone dying when we hoped they would live. Our experience is full of stories that don't end well. So, maybe Hollywood thought we wanted to see movies like that, but I hate those movies. I don't watch a movie to be reminded of how bad life can be. I want to be inspired to think about what it'll be like when Jesus makes all of this right. I want to inspire my mind to imagine a world where justice is served because that is the very thing I'm hoping and waiting for. That is the thing that helps me be patient. That's why I like movies like Denzel Washington's movie, *Man on Fire*. It's a movie about an old washed up mercenary who is assigned to a security detail that is supposed to be a simple, no-action job. He takes a job as a body guard for an innocent little girl living in Mexico City who has very wealthy parents. What he doesn't know is that this girl's father has gotten into serious debt and plans on letting his daughter get kidnapped so that he can cash in on his insurance policy that pays a ransom if his daughter is kidnapped, and he's going to split that ransom with her kidnappers. The plot of the movie from there is that this girl falls into the hands of awful men at the request of her awful father, and she becomes the poster child of injustice. Denzel Washington's character then sobers up and comes to life and uses the impressive skills that he has sharpened and honed over a lifetime of military and mercenary activity to bring JUSTICE down on the heads of everyone who had anything to do with the injustices done against this girl, and it is AWESOME!

Denzel's name in the movie is Creasy. At one point in the movie, when things are just starting to heat up, Christophe Walken, who plays Creasy's friend, Rayburn, says: *"A man can be an artist... in anything, food, whatever. It depends on how good he is at it. Creasy's art is death. He's about to paint his masterpiece. He'll deliver more justice in a weekend than ten years of your courts and tribunals."* Creasy, this unlikely hero, enters into a world of extreme injustice, a world ruled by evil cartels and corrupt politicians. The weak and powerless are the prey who are constantly trampled underfoot and consumed by the unjust and evil men who use them for their pleasure any way they choose, and there is NO justice. The courts and justice systems that do exist are either powerless or corrupt, but one man walks right into the middle of all of that and brings the justice that so many have longed for in one weekend!

These are the movies that encourage my imagination towards Jesus. In this world, and for the time being, injustice wins. The best that we can hope for is the tainted justice that one unjust man can exact on other unjust men, but it won't always be like this. There is coming, one day, the only one who can PERFECTLY carry out justice and right all of the wrong's in this world. And He will do so rightly and so justly that none will question, and all will see how great He is. It will be like nothing that we have ever seen before.

⁷ 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. ⁸ You also, be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Establish your hearts! Be strong in patience! Be willing and ready to WAIT! Don't grow weary your waiting. It may feel long overdue, but He is coming soon, and when He does, He will bring absolute justice with Him. And all who have waited for Him will be satisfied with what He does to right every wrong.

⁹ Do not grumble against one another.

In many ways, the opposite of patient waiting is grumbling. Patient waiting trusts in the one who is to come. Grumbling exposes a lack of trust, yet it's one of the most common responses to being asked to wait patiently. We don't wait well. Many of the places we most hate going to are the places we are asked to wait.

Take the airport, for example. You have to wait in traffic to get there. Then, you wait in line to check in with your airline. Then, you wait in line to go through security. Then, you wait for the shuttle to take you to the terminal. Then, you go to your gate and wait for them to let you on. Then, you sit down on the plane and wait for all the people who think their full-size suitcases should fit in the overhead compartment figure out what to do with their bag now. Then, the pilot has to wait for permission to take off. Then, you land, and what do you have to do there? Wait. You go to baggage claim, and yet again wait. It's no wonder so many people go crazy on airplanes!

But James is specific that our grumbling should not be against one another. It's one thing to express that you are having trouble in your current situation. It's another thing to turn on the people around you because you are struggling.

Galatians 5 reminds us, **¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another."**

When things aren't going the way we want them to, or when we are forced to be patient, it's easy to turn on the people around us. James warns against this, as he calls us to patience.

Therefore, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

There are a lot of reasons not to grumble against one another, but James highlights one such reason here: so that you may not be judged. The Judge is standing at the door. This is not a good time to misbehave. This is our fair warning: Jesus could return at any time.

Though there are many exceptions, most people would find it to be a good idea to be on their best behavior while waiting inside a courtroom for the judge to arrive. Most people don't want to be found messing around when the judge walks in, especially if you're the one about to be judged. In fact, most people, even hardened criminals, will dress nice and make themselves look as presentable as possible for this occasion.

Well, James reminds us that the return of the Lord is imminent; it could happen at any moment.

Remember the prophets.

¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James now points us to the example of the prophets who patiently and faithfully preached and waited for the coming of the Lord, which they never saw during their lives on earth. The prophets are the ones who stood in the gap between the God of holiness and the people of injustice and pled for them to repent and receive God's mercy, and yet they longed with great passion for the Lord to come and bring an end to the injustices they witnessed. And they faithfully ministered in this gap, and that is exactly what God calls us to.

Hebrews 11:32-40

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

They lived and died without ever seeing what we've had the privilege of seeing: the revelation of God's good plan in Jesus Christ. They lived patient, steadfast lives in the gap, and we consider them blessed because of their patient faithfulness.

¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained 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.

Specifically, James points us to Job as an example of steadfastness. This is encouraging in that it reveals that James's idea of patient steadfastness leaves room for struggling. Job was thrown into intense suffering when his children died. His property was destroyed, his health failed, and he had a VERY hard time accepting any of this. Throughout the Book of Job, he makes his complaints known. But he appears to do so in an appropriate way. For starters, he accepts his suffering as from the Lord and refuses to curse him. Nevertheless, he calls on God to come and make sense of his suffering, but he never abandoned faith in God.

William Barclay said it this way, "Job's is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart."

God responds strongly to Job in the form of what I would call a rebuke, but it's a good rebuke. It's a loving rebuke. It's a rebuke that is intended, not so much to shame Job, but to humble and comfort him by ensuring him that God is in control, and that nothing is too big for Him to handle.

This is the example of steadfastness that James points us to. It's not a steadfastness that doesn't have questions, or even complaints, but it is a steadfastness that believes and trusts in God's sovereignty and addresses the hard questions to Him instead of turning them into groaning against others. God can handle our questions and our struggling.

You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

And ultimately, we have a huge advantage over Job: we have his story and many others, plus the coming of Jesus (His death and resurrection) and the entire New Testament to let us in on what God is doing, as well as his plan for us and for this world. I'm not saying that our will still includes the emotions that He displayed during his suffering, but we have a far greater revelation of God's plan to FUEL or faith, even in times of difficulty. So, remain steadfast! Job, and these prophets that James mentions, have a happy ending to their stories, and so will we! Job's health and possessions were restored, and God gave him an even bigger family to enjoy

them with than he began with. And the prophets who died without seeing the coming of Jesus see Him now and rejoice that their patient and steadfast commitment to Him paved the way for Jesus to come, and ultimately for us to receive Him. We are the answer to their prayers. We are the fruit of their labor that they so longed to see in their day (people who have turned from their sinful ways of injustice and are following the Lord).

And so, with them as our example, let's:

Remember the purpose of the Lord and His compassion and mercy!

We are patient and steadfast because we serve a God who has promised to work all things together for good for those who love Him. There is no suffering, no difficulty, and no challenge on the path of following Christ that won't ultimately work for your good. The God who wrote a happy ending to Job's story, the God who walked alongside the prophets and welcomed them into Heaven, the God who has proved His good purpose over and over again, and the God who is full of compassion and mercy, calls us to be patient and to remain steadfast. He has called us to stand in the gap between His holy judgement and the injustices of our world and to invite others to flee from the wrath that is to come and to receive the compassion and mercy that we have received.

If you are on the other side of God's purpose today, meaning that you have not received His compassion and mercy by turning from your sin and trusting Jesus as your Savior, then today you are invited to come and receive salvation. Exchange judgment for compassion and mercy today, while you still can. God's patience, compassion and mercy are the reason that you are still alive and here today. He loves you and wants to save you.