



Faith Vindicated through Patience and Prayer James 5

Introduction

James has made his case for an active, fruitful faith. He closes his letter with a final warning to the rich, a call to patience for the others, and a powerful exhortation to prayer.

Outline of James 5

- I. Rebuke and Retribution of the Calloused Rich - James 5:1-6
- II. Reward of Patience - James 5:7-12
- III. Rejoicing and the Power of Prayer - James 5:13-18
- IV. Rescue the Perishing - James 5:19-20

I. Rebuke and Retribution of the Calloused Rich - James 5:1-6

The Lord Jesus Christ ministered to both the rich and poor without distinction. He did, however, have much to say about both conditions and to both classes of people. His half-brother, James, closes this epistle with scathing comments to those who use their riches to oppress. The whole passage is reminiscent of Matthew 23 and Jesus' excoriating denunciation upon the Pharisees. Both present an awesome glimpse of future judgment when those who have lived for self without faith in Christ will be condemned by their deeds.

A. Warning - Danger Ahead! - James 5:1-3

James warns the rich and powerful to look ahead. The tide will turn against them and they will not always be in control. The world scene changes. Groups on top one day are deposed the next.

1. Weeping and howling - 5:1

James paints an apocalyptic picture of financial disaster ahead, reminiscent of 1929 in America when the economy collapsed and many fortunes evaporated. Men jumped out of windows or put pistols to their heads. During the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, the wealthy and powerful feared for their lives and tried to escape the guillotine. In the present day, many of the rich live in exile. Some have fled homelands leaving their wealth behind or having spent all for escape.

James probably heard Jesus teach, *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither*

moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-20).

Are you laboring only for the *food which perishes* (John 6:27)? Or do you also work for that eternal fruit which can never be taken away? Do you trust God to provide when you put His work first?

2. Corrupting riches - 5:2

Government and commercial fluctuations can erode savings overnight. Christians are not meant to trust in uncertain riches but in the Living God.

3. Moth-eaten garments - 5:2

The most luxurious wardrobe deteriorates in time or goes out of style. Also, clothes are outgrown. Surely they are a flimsy tie to happiness. What is more fleeting than fashion or more destructible than cloth?

The Lord Jesus had one seamless robe, and it was taken from Him. Yet, He alone can clothe those who believe in Him with a robe of righteousness, the *fine linen* of the saints (Revelation 19:8,14). Do you have this "wardrobe?"

4. Rusted gold and silver - 5:3

This speaks of withering monetary values. Even as "confederate" money was instantly useless when the Civil War ended in the U.S., monetary values shift with political changes. Governments issue money and governments withdraw it. Those who trust in their money often find it useless. Even if it holds its face value, there is much that money cannot buy, such as love, respect, loyalty, salvation, and eternal life. Eternally, money has no value at all apart from the good it does on earth.

B. Howling Oppression - James 5:4-6

"The worker is worthy of his hire" is a moral principle. Slavery and the exploitations of others is not condoned by God who created all men and women equal in His sight. The principle of "a just wage for a day's work" was first proposed within the Judeo-Christian ethic. Pagan societies instituted slavery, a cruel form of oppression found as far back in time as historical records go. Virtually all races have been enslaved by others at some time. The Romans enslaved their conquered populaces in Western Europe, North Africa, and Asia Minor. Prior to that, the Greeks, Babylonians,

Assyrians, and Egyptians enslaved conquered peoples. The Pyramids were built with slave labor. Slaves were the labor force before the Industrial Age. Slavery knows no racial bounds and was not instituted by God nor the Bible, but rather by paganism, greed, and cruelty. Fallen mankind oppress one another even as Satan enslaves and oppresses human beings. Jesus Christ is the Great Liberator, the Emancipator. He sets people free.

1. Paying workers on time - 5:4

God declares it fraud to hold back wages. Moses instructed the Israelites to pay their workers daily. The payroll must be met as a first priority. People are supremely important. Profits cannot be reckoned until the workers are paid. This upholds the dignity of each individual.

An employer takes on a moral obligation to be just to his employees. Paul reminds masters that they are also under a Master (Colossians 4:1).

Spiritually speaking, before coming to faith in Christ, all one can earn is debt. The apostle Paul wrote, *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23). Each person deserves death, the wages of sin. *But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord*. Everyone should be thankful that, by God's grace, we do not get what we deserve.

2. The cries of the oppressed - 5:4

The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Lord of Sabaoth is a particular title for God, meaning "Lord of Hosts." It implies that God's heavenly armies are greater than earthly armies. One emperor once laughed when denounced by a pope saying, "The Pope! How many armies does he have?" Not long after, he found himself begging help from that same Pope!

All wrongs will one day be righted, either at the Judgment Seat of Christ or on Judgment Day. This is a mystery, for no one knows how the Judge of all the earth will do it, but only that He will do it (2 Timothy 4:8 and Hebrews 12:23). Every cry is heard and recorded in heaven. Are you abusing anyone or treating anyone unjustly -- a child, a parent, an employee, a neighbor, or some helpless person? Beware of God's inescapable judgment.

II. Reward of Patience - James 5:7-12

Requirements for the powerful do not mean that there are no requirements for the poor and powerless. If the wealthy are told not to oppress, the oppressed are not to rebel, but to be patient, trusting God to work in His time and way. Patience is not passive. It actively trusts and exercises expectancy.

James identifies with those who are oppressed, calling them "brethren."

A. The Time of Reward - James 5:7

1. Christ's return - 5:7

The Coming of the Lord is one of only four references in James to the Lord Jesus Christ (others include 1:1, 2:1, and 5:8). In the New Testament, one out of twenty verses refer in some way to the return of Jesus Christ. Believers eagerly await that day. Indeed, believers are commanded to *Watch!* For we do not know when it will occur (Mark 13:33, 35, 37). If believers eagerly watch for that event, oppressed believers do so even more.

2. Therefore - 5:7

Because people will oppress, injustice will continue and evil will seem to triumph. Patience is necessary to avoid stepping out of God's will. Believers need to refrain from grumbling, complaining and rebellion. Instead, we should encourage others to trust the Lord and look for Him, too.

B. Three Examples of Patience - James 5:7b-11

1. Farmers - 5:7b-8

Farmers are a classic example of patience. Patience means waiting for the right time. Times and seasons are in God's providence. Who can hurry the seasons? We cannot make the sun rise earlier or later, so we adjust our clocks! Flowers bloom in their appointed time. The growth of grain cannot be hurried. The farmer learns to control his anxiety. He waits. He learns that patience prevents frustration, wasted energies, and useless activity. Waiting is difficult because it seems easier to do something. Patience necessitates self-control. It is a virtue commended in Scripture. Patience is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:22).

Patience is a choice. Believers are called to calm their strivings as Jesus calmed the winds and waves. Palestine has its *early and latter rain* which may represent those events which encourage waiting patiently. They may be like showers of blessing. Sometimes patience has its own reward, for things happen during waiting times which might not have happened otherwise or might have gone unnoticed in our hurry.

2. The prophets - 5:10

The prophets are examples of those who have spoken in the *name of the Lord* and wait for results from their preaching. God's prophets such as Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, and Daniel were patient until death. In fact, they looked beyond death to events far ahead of

them in history. They endured opposition, rejection, imprisonment, danger, and death without losing their reward. They neither rebelled nor retaliated when rejected, scorned, and mistreated.

Are you suffering for obeying God? Are you tempted to strike back or take yourself out of the situation? Will you choose to stay and wait for God's action or direction?

3. Job (who received a double reward) - 5:11

Some hardships and suffering may occur to show how God rewards those who endure difficulties (James 1:12). A harvest of souls in a mission area often means that there has been a generation or two of fruitless, dogged persistence by faithful missionaries who saw little or no fruit.

Patience involves perseverance. Job lost almost everything, but his story was not complete until the last chapter of the book when God *restored Job's losses*, giving him *twice as much as he had before* (Job 42:10). Job's story displays the extraordinary compassion and mercy of God.

Only when you have endured hardship, been faithful in affliction, and patient in trial can you know the extent of the kindness of God. Only then will others observe God's compassion and tenderness and want to know more about the Lord. When observers begin to study His word and pray, then your suffering bears fruit.

C. Unacceptable Alternatives to Patience - James 5:12

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. Here again, words are indicators of weak faith and patience that is wearing thin. As Job refused to curse God in his suffering, believers today must not curse Him nor rail against Him. Nor should we begin to criticize others (5:9). Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 5:34-37, *Do not swear at all, neither by heaven...nor by earth...but let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No.'* James quotes this almost verbatim.

III. Rejoicing and the Power of Prayer - James 5:13-20

A. As a Priority - James 5:13-16

1. Prayer when afflicted - 5:13

If criticizing others or cursing God are inappropriate responses, what is a good response? James writes, *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray!* When sorrow or trouble comes, the first response should be

to God. Take the burden to Him immediately and leave it there (Psalm 55:22).

When you pray, you express your emotions and receive strength so that there is no need to swear or curse God. Prayer is the link to Him and His purposes. Rather than going under, you will be able to rise above your circumstances.

2. Singing psalms when happy - 5:13

Are you happy because things are going well? Did you receive a promotion, an unexpected gift? Sing your praise to God. *Sing psalms*, James says. The Book of Psalms is there to give assistance in proclaiming praise to God. James, who was Jewish, was accustomed to using them in this way. Jesus sang with His disciples on the last night of His life when facing crucifixion (Matthew 26:30).

Why not pause right now and sing praise to God using His own words, a psalm such as *The Lord is My Shepherd* (Psalm 23)? Do you keep a hymn book handy for worship and singing?

3. Calling for elders when sick - 5:14

Is this verse a "credit card" for healing, as some take it, or an orderly process for some kinds of illness? Some sickness is fatal, some is not; some is the direct result of sin, some is not (John 9:3). The subject of this section is not sickness, but prayer. Some people pull James 5:14-15 out of context and use it as they would a nursing manual. Then they are bitter when it "doesn't work."

Many people have followed the procedure recommended here but without desired results. Too often this has been a last resort, with the same results as other last resorts. Is it not a bit unfair to use prayer as a last resort and then complain that it does not work? Prayer is meant to be a first resort, the first response of faith.

The crisis of illness in James does seem to be related to sin, as is evident from the calling of the elders, to whom confession is made, and the anointing with oil which symbolizes consecration (Exodus 40:13 and 1 Samuel 16:13). Most sick people recover without these measures being applied. Others die who have used these measures. Perhaps the answer is to take this verse in context. Confession and consecration are required if there is sin in a life. The elders are there to pray for mercy.

The apostle Paul once consigned an incorrigible sinning church member to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that the person's spirit might be saved (1 Corinthians 5:5). Most illnesses do not fall into that category. If they

did, there would be many more very ill people. See Acts 5: 9, 1 Corinthians 11:28-32, and 1 John 5:16.

Are you suffering from some disease or physical difficulty which could be attributable to a specific sin you have committed or are committing? Mature spiritual church leaders may be able to help you find God's forgiveness and restoration with its release from guilt.

The increase of open sin in society is accompanied by an increase of disease and illness, both mental and physical. Spiritual ignorance and immoral choices reap poor health and premature deaths.

Will you ask God to reveal the unhealthy attitudes, practices, or indulgences in your life? Will you confess known faults to spiritually minded friends and pray for one another? It is good to stay in touch with your elders "in the Lord" so as not to return to former ways.

B. As a Practice - James 5:16-18

1. Fervent prayer of ordinary people - 5:16-17

Elijah is given as an example of someone *with a nature like ours*. But he prayed and the results were extraordinary. He affected nature with his prayers. What could you affect with your prayers?

The KJV reads *effectual, fervent prayer* (5:16). Two adjectives are needed for one intense Greek word. Half-hearted prayers are usually ineffective. But in the light of God's mercy, half-hearted prayers are better than none.

In a maturing Christian life, prayer becomes increasingly important. Prayer takes effort, time, and thought. Jesus certainly gave it much more effort, time, and thought than most Christians do today. If He felt the need for such a prayer life, how much more do we need it?

2. Consistent prayer - James 5:18

Elijah *prayed again*. So often people stop praying too soon and never appreciate the full extent of answered prayer. Jesus said to *Ask, seek, knock* (Matthew 7:7), a consistent, progressive act. Let us pray until we have assurance that the matter is committed to God and the answer is on the way.

IV. Rescue the Perishing - James 5:19-20

A. Erring and Converting - James 5:19

Turning another from erroneous ways is the pinnacle of faith's works. So far, James has dealt with the results of a person's faith in his or her own life: their words, works, trials, and reactions. Faith's highest use is

reproduction, the creation of faith in another person, even as reproduction realizes the body's potential.

1. The unconverted person's error - 5:19

The rejection of Jesus Christ is the greatest mistake in life. It is the error of one's ways. The truth about Jesus Christ is that He is the Savior. The way of truth is to know Him. The unbeliever errs and is committed to error. Everyone needs conversion. To find Christ is to find the truth. Then the truth sets you free (John 8:32).

2. Conversion is possible - 5:19

The erring person is described as *anyone among you*. Some tend to think of the unconverted as "out there," across an ocean, down on skid row, or in some remote area. But they are nearby: relatives, friends, neighbors, and associates. Until we have shared our faith with those nearest and dearest to us, how can we expect God and the Gospel to work elsewhere? If your faith is not effective "here," how will it be effective "there?" We need not reach very far to touch someone who is erring from the truth.

B. Faith's Eternal Fruit - James 5:20

1. Converted person saved from error

Proverbs says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death* (Proverbs 14:12). How tragic to live one's life following the wrong way and only find it out at the end.

Unconverted persons think the weight of sin they carry around is normal. They adopt various ways of coping with it: superstitions, compulsive habits, dabbling in the occult, astrology, drinking, sexual misbehavior, abuse, drugs, to name a few.

2. Converted person saved from death

The converted person passes from death unto life at the moment of conversion (John 5:24). That person receives victory over the fear of death which holds the unconverted hostage (Hebrews 2:15). Saved people may even escape physical death if they are alive at the Lord's return for His own (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Are you ready now?

The effect of receiving Christ is release from the weight and burden of sin. Will you act on your freedom from sin's power in your thought life? Will you forsake things such as worry, anger, and physical indulgences (such as overeating and drinking)? Will you thank Jesus Christ for saving you from error, sin, and death?

C. Conclusion

James closes with the crowning act of faith, bringing another to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This fruitfulness is the result of victorious faith which has found the meaning of life. Victorious faith causes a multitude of horrible sins, for which Christ died, to be buried in the deepest sea. When you share your victorious faith with someone, you send a person on the right way to do the same, bearing more eternal fruit. This vindicates faith which is victorious over trials, views people impartially, is verbal but nonviolent, and virile and valiant in vexations.

This is valid faith in Christ.

Application

Do you have faith in Christ as the Lord of your life and your only means of salvation? If not, will you turn to Him now, repenting of your sin and confessing your need? Will you acknowledge Him as your Savior and Lord and humbly follow and obey Him?

If you have done this, what step is God asking you to take in response to this study? Will you begin today in faith? Will you choose to be a better disciple and discipler, exercising your faith with actions and words? Who do you know who may be waiting to have you share your spiritual life with him or her?