James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Twelve

Until the Coming of the Lord

Patience, False Promises, and Where Our Hope Actually Is

James 5:7–11

James does not promise his suffering readers that things are about to improve. He promises something better and further off, and then tells them how to live until it arrives.

i. Be Patient

James 5:7

> 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.
> James 5:7, ESV

In light of the moment they are in, suffering and persecution and oppression, the answer is patience. That is worth sitting with, because it points at a theme that runs through the whole New Testament. In the middle of oppression, James does not say fight fire with fire. Not overthrow your oppressors. Not rebellion, not revolution. Patience. That can be a hard pill to swallow.

We may dissent. John MacArthur frames it this way: we have no license as Christians to take up arms and overthrow our oppressors. We can dissent, but we cannot rebel.

Which means what? We can hide, we can run, we can refuse to comply. We take the consequences that come with it.

The answer never changes. Wherever the New Testament addresses a suffering believer, it says the same thing every time.

> *Be patient, endure, don't give up on Jesus, and don't repay evil for evil.*

ii. What He Actually Promised

James 5:8

> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.
> James 5:8, ESV

We want James to say that breakthrough is coming, deliverance is coming, change is coming, that if you keep doing what is right your life will turn around. He does not say it, and he does not promise it, because he is being honest with them. It might happen. It might just as easily not.

The paradigm. There is an idea in the western church that good things happen to the faithful. Sometimes they do. They are not guaranteed. Faithfulness does not reliably produce the house, the job, the promotion, or the breakthrough.

What Scripture does promise. Trial, tribulation, suffering, joy in the middle of it, peace, grace, the salvation of our souls, an advocate, a friend who sticks closer than a brother, and eternal reward for the faithful.

Before We Begin

James has just turned to the world outside the church and pronounced judgment on it. Most Protestant scholars hold the outsider view of that paragraph, that it is not addressed to his readers at all.

He lets the people of God watch him do it, and he does it to comfort them. He promises judgment on the people afflicting them, he validates that the trial is real, and he draws a line between a believer who has lost ground and a godless world.

Now he tells them what to do while they wait. Pay close attention to what he does not say.

Words to Know

Be Patient

μακροθυμέω · makrothymeō

Long-tempered. To hold out a long while without giving way.

Steadfastness

ὑπομονή · hypomonē

Remaining under. Bearing up rather than escaping.

Coming

παρουσία · parousia

Arrival. The word used for a king's royal visit.

Establish

στηρίζω · stērizō

To set firmly. To prop a thing in place so it holds.

Not until. Not until revival sweeps the land. Not until you see breakthrough. Not until the Lord removes the oppressor. Be patient until the coming of the Lord.

Which implies something. The suffering may not lift before that day. There will be seasons of calm. That is not the same as it being over.

> *Our hope isn't that things get better or easier. Our hope is the coming of the Lord.*

iii. Take the Prophets

JAMES 5:9–11

> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 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.
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> JAMES 5:10–11, ESV

First one more word about how we treat each other under pressure, and he ties it to the same event he has been pointing at all along. Do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged, because the Judge is standing at the door. Then he turns to Scripture for comfort and hands them the prophets and Job.

Why these names? Because every one of them was faithful and suffered for it. Not one is an example of faithfulness producing an easier life.

They kept going. They did not lose faith and they did not lose heart. That is what James means by steadfastness.

The purpose of the Lord. You have seen it, he says. The Lord is compassionate and merciful. That is where the story ends, not where it sits right now.

> *They were faithful, and bad things happened to them anyway.*

Suffering and Patience

- Isaiah *martyred, by tradition*
- Jeremiah *beaten and imprisoned*
- Ezekiel *exile, then his wife*
- Daniel *the lions' den*
- Hosea *an unfaithful wife*
- Amos *told to stop preaching*
- Job *everything but his life*

Seven names, and not one of them is an example of faithfulness producing an easier life. James offers them as comfort anyway.

Take It Further

1. Where are you waiting on a breakthrough God never promised?
2. What changes if your hope is His coming rather than your circumstances?
3. Who are you grumbling against while you wait?
4. Which of these seven stories is closest to yours right now?
5. Name something you are enduring that you keep expecting to end.

Notes

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