



The Final Six Messages in the Book of James Series

Dr. Strauss preached his last message on August 15, 2013. He went home to the Lord on September 11, 1993, after an ordeal with multiple myeloma (bone cancer). Because he usually worked six weeks ahead, he had completed the remaining messages in the James series. A booklet of these sermons was produced; the chapters are available at SpiritualGold.org, in separate PDF files for easy downloading.

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Except where otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Bible.

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Lord, Give Me Patience

James 5:7-12

PURPOSE:

To help us develop patience.

“Lord, give me patience, and give it to me now!” That’s the message on a plaque you can buy in some Christian bookstores. And it so beautifully sums up the way many of us feel. Patience isn’t one of our more noteworthy virtues. We don’t like to wait for anything. We’ve been conditioned to expect things NOW! We have instant food: just add water, or just microwave for two and a half minutes, and presto!—a complete tasty dinner is on the table. We have instant information: hit a few keys on the computer and connect yourself with volumes of information on almost any subject via modem; fax your letter and get it there instantly, don’t wait for the postal service to deliver it; tune in to Headline News and learn what’s going on in the world in 30 minutes; read a newsletter that summarizes all the information you need; read a two-page condensation, don’t waste your time reading the whole book.

We have instant travel. Whereas it took our ancestors months and months to cross the continent, we can hop on a plane and fly

coast to coast in a few hours. And if the plane is delayed a few minutes it drives us crazy. We can even get uptight waiting for an elevator. Maybe you saw the comic some time ago picturing a man waiting for an elevator. Each frame of the cartoon showed the indicator needle hovering on the upper floors, and the man getting more and more impatient. In the final frame he had leaped up, and, with his feet firmly braced against the ceiling, was trying to force the needle around to his floor. That’s a little far-fetched, but it does remind us of how impatient we can be.

People in the early church were no different from us. They didn’t have telephones interrupting them, or solicitors knocking on their doors, or cars cutting in front of them on the freeway, or airplanes delayed in take-off. But they had irritations. We just saw one in the preceding paragraph—rich employers trying to cheat them out of their duly earned wages. That’s enough to get anybody upset. And that’s what leads into this treatise on patience. James 5:7-12 is an interesting paragraph, somewhat repetitious, and difficult to outline. So I would like to break it down by subject—the commands relating to patience, the examples of patience, and the reasons for patience.

1. THE COMMANDS RELATING TO PATIENCE

a. Be patient, vs.7,8

“Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord,” i.e., right up until the moment the Lord returns for His own (v.7a). And he repeats it again in verse 8, using the same word: “You also be patient” (v.8a). While just about every translation uses the word “patient,” it is actually the Greek word (*makrothumeo*) made up of two other words—one meaning “long,” and the second “anger, rage, wrath or temper.” It means literally “long-tempered.” In other words, when it comes to losing your cool, put your timer on its maximum setting. One scholar says, “Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is

the opposite of anger.”¹ Patient people are not easily irritated or upset; they don’t fly off the handle—particularly with people who cause them personal delay, distress or suffering. This word describes patience with people; not so much circumstance, but people—exasperating people.

It could be anybody. Your husband or wife. Husbands and wives are experts at irritating each other. They know just what buttons to push to send their mates into a rage. It may be your children. Children are even more skilled at driving us to the end of our rope. It could be a hard-headed boss, or an incompetent employee, or a discourteous clerk at the store, or an ill-mannered driver, or a bothersome neighbor. But whoever they are, they get you so mad you could spit rusty nails. Don’t let them! That’s the command here. Be long-tempered! James isn’t saying it will be easy. It won’t. But there is divine assistance available. The Apostle Paul taught us that the fruit of the Spirit is long-suffering (which is the noun form of this same word). When we let Him take control of our lives, we can do what James tells us to do. We can truly be patient.

There are other commands in the passage as well which are associated with patience...

b. Establish your heart, v.8

“Establish” comes from a word that means “prop or support.” Prop up your heart, says James. Your HEART! Your inner life. Make it firm and strong and steady and resolute. Instead of getting agitated with the people around you, develop an inner sense of stability. And YOU need to do that. God isn’t going to do for you what you can do for yourself. It’s like the little girl who told a friend that her brother had set traps to catch birds, and she didn’t think that was right. The friend asked her what she did about it. “I prayed that God would keep the birds out of the traps.” “Anything else?” “Well, yes, I went and kicked the traps all to pieces.”²

So what can we do to strengthen our hearts? We’re back to our relationship to the Spirit of God again. Be filled with the Spirit. Yield your will to Him, keep your mind focused on Him and His Word. As somebody has put it, “If the outlook is dark, try the uplook.” That will strengthen your inner life, and that strengthened inner life will enable you to be patient with those exasperating people.

c. Don’t grumble, v.9

“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (v.9). That word grumble (stenadzo) has the idea of sighing and groaning, smoldering feelings of resentment that erupt in bitterness and antagonism. When the pressure is on, it’s easy to get out of sorts with the people close to us. We tend to blame them for our problems, find fault with them for not being more understanding, complain and criticize them because they don’t try to make life more pleasant for us. Sometimes we even grumble at God. That’s the very opposite of patience. We’ve all heard that little ditty that goes:

To walk above with saints we love,
That will indeed be glory;
To walk below with saints we know—
Well, that’s another story!

James is reflecting the words of our Lord Jesus here: “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Mt.7:1-2).

There’s a fourth command...

d. Don’t swear, v.12

“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and

your 'No,' 'No,' lest you fall into judgment" (v.12). Don't use the Lord's name to emphasize your feelings if you begin to get impatient with people who irritate you. And don't be using the Lord's name to add weight to what you say when you express yourself. We've all heard people who try to convince us they're telling the truth by saying things like, "I swear to God," or "So help me God," or "Honest to God," or "God is my witness." That's unnecessary for a true believer. If we could always be counted on to tell the truth we wouldn't need to add such oaths. That's the point here—"Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No' be 'No.'" Say what you mean and mean what you say, and don't ever let your words be clouded by exaggeration or distortion. Jesus said exactly the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt.5:34-37).

The Jews of that day sometimes played fancy little games with oaths, substituting "heaven," or the "temple," or something else for "God," and then claiming the oath was not binding because they didn't use God's name. That was obviously unacceptable. But if we tell the truth all the time, we won't have to use any kind of oath to establish our truthfulness. People will simply believe us. They will have no reason not to. The more we punctuate our conversation with oaths, the more suspicious we become. Just tell the truth. I must point out that James is not referring to legal oaths, required in a court of law, as some have suggested. The Bible insists that we obey the laws of the land. But if everybody told the truth all the time, we could even eliminate the need for oaths from our courts.

So much for the commands. Note next...

2. THE EXAMPLES OF PATIENCE

James suggests three examples. The first is...

a. The farmer, v.7

"See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain"

(v.7b). One of the early church fathers claimed that James didn't follow in his father's occupation of carpenter, but that he was a farmer. Maybe that's why he uses illustrations from the farm. Farmers in Israel counted on the early rains between October and December to soften the ground for planting and to germinate the seed that was sown. Then they needed the latter rains in March and April to mature the fruit and bring in the harvest. Getting upset with God and complaining to Him for not sending the rains on time wouldn't make the rains come any sooner or the crops grow any faster. They just had to be patient. "You be like them," says James. You also be patient.

b. The prophets, v.10

"My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience" (v.10). There was probably no better example of people who were treated wrongfully, yet patiently endured it without retaliation, than the Old Testament prophets...men like Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. Their message was not always very popular, and people resented them and persecuted them, but they didn't fight back. They just kept on doing the will of God. Think of Jeremiah who had to predict the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. He was accused of being a traitor, put in stocks, thrown into prison, lowered into a soggy dungeon and left to die, yet when he was rescued he continued to minister without bitterness or recrimination. What an example! Some of us get all shook up if our spouse says a cross word, or the doctor keeps us waiting, or the server at the restaurant mixes up our order. But the most famous example of all...

c. Job, v.11

"Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful" (v.11). This is very interesting. Suddenly James changes words. Instead of the one he's been using that refers to patience with people, he choos-

es the word that means patience with circumstances (upomone). The major idea in this word is endurance, sticking with it even when it's tough, keeping on under the fiercest pressure without caving in. This is the word he used back in James 1:3-4 and 1:12, the trait that, when permitted to do its full work, makes us complete and whole. (While long-suffering is used of God, endurance never is, because while people whom He created with volition provoke Him and He is patient with them, He controls the circumstances.)

We must admit, Job wasn't always a very good example of long-suffering. He got upset with his three friends for their long-winded speeches and false-accusations, and even blamed God for treating him unfairly. But he did endure. He never gave up. He hung in there with a triumphant trust in God. Even when his wife gave up and suggested he curse God and die, he refused. On one occasion he said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). When we talk about the patience of Job we're talking about his endurance. And in that he is a great example to us.

Alright, now we know we're supposed to be patient, and we've seen some outstanding examples. Furthermore, we've learned that there are two sides to the coin of patience—restraining ourselves when people provoke us, and remaining steadfast with courage and conviction in the most difficult circumstances. But why should we be patient? You have probably picked up some reasons as we have gone through these verses. Let's list them.

3. THE REASONS FOR PATIENCE

a. The Lord is coming, vs.7-9

This is the most obvious one. It is repeated several times over. "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord" (v.7). The early church lived in the constant awareness that Jesus was going to come back again, just as He had promised. Furthermore, they believed that He could come at any time.

That's the idea in James 5:8—"Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." The words "at hand" (engizo) mean "to come near, to approach." The coming of the Lord is imminent, that is, likely to happen at any time, and we should be looking for Him (cf. Phil.3:20; Tit.2:13). And when He comes He is going to deliver us from all our trials. Just knowing that ought to help us be patient.

If you had a serious illness, but you knew you were going to recover completely, even if it would take some time, that assurance would give you strength and courage to keep going on patiently, wouldn't it? It would be worth waiting for. Just so, the promise of our Lord's sure return can give us courage to keep going on patiently, come what may. When He comes He is going to relieve all our suffering, right all the wrongs committed against us, and punish all evildoers. That's worth waiting for.

But He's going to do something else too, and that is hold us accountable for our actions. Read James 5:9 again. There is the imminence of our Lord's return again—He's standing at heaven's door, ready to push it open, break through the blue at any moment and receive us unto Himself. But remember, He's the Judge. He'll be the one who sits on the Judgment Seat and evaluates our lives and rewards us accordingly. And that's good reason not to grumble against one another, and good reason to be patient with irritating people, and patient in difficult circumstances. Be patient, because the Lord is coming, and it could be today. Furthermore...

b. He promises blessing, v.11a

"Indeed, we count them blessed who endure." Look back at those Old Testament prophets who responded to their trials with patient endurance. We recognize that the blessing of God was on their lives. Their confident trust in God brought them a peace and a satisfaction that nothing in this world could offer. And then there was Job. "You have seen the end (or aim) intended by the

Lord" (v.11b). One of God's purposes in allowing Job to suffer such trials was to bless Him. He was blessed with a more intimate relationship with the Lord than he had ever experienced before (Job 42:5), and he was blessed with an abundant supply of all his needs (Job 42:12).

And then there is the promise of eternal reward which James has already described in 1:12, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." I don't fully understand what that crown of life will entail, but it certainly sounds attractive. It's one of the reasons I want to endure patiently. But there's one more...

c. He deeply cares, v.11b

"He is very compassionate and merciful" (v.11b). Job's experience proves to us beyond all doubt that the Lord knows about our problems, and He deeply cares. Job did doubt that for awhile, but before it was all over he was thoroughly convinced that God is full of compassion, i.e., He feels deeply with us in our suffering. And He is full of mercy, i.e., not only does He feel our hurts just as intensely as we do, but He acts in kindness to relieve our distress. Knowing how much He cares can help us weather the storms and emerge triumphant.

CONCLUSION

When I think of patient endurance, my mind goes back to the amazing story of the 40 martyrs of Sebaste. The calendar on the wall read 320 A.D. Licinius was reigning over the eastern portion of the divided Roman empire, but he was sensing an increasing military threat from the west. He became more and more repressive in his policies, particularly toward Christians. To solidify his position, he called on his armies to demonstrate their support by offering a sacrifice to his pagan gods.

Most of the legion stationed at Sebaste, a city south of the Black Sea, dutifully complied, but forty Cappadocian soldiers, all

Christians, respectfully declined. For more than a week they were placed under guard, where they sang and prayed together continually. Their captain pleaded with them: "Of all the soldiers who serve the emperor, none are more loved by us and more needed right now. Do not turn our love into hatred. It lies in you whether to be loved or hated." "If it rests with us," they replied, "we have made our choice. We shall devote our love to our God."

At sundown they were stripped and escorted shivering to the middle of a frozen lake with guards stationed along the shore. A heated Roman bathhouse stood ready at the shore for any of them who were prepared to renounce their faith in Christ and offer a pagan sacrifice. Their jailer stood by with arms folded, watching, as a bitter winter wind whipped across the ice. But through the whistling wind the soldiers could be heard singing:

Forty good soldiers for Christ!
We shall not depart from You as long as You give us life.
We shall call upon Your Name whom all creation praises;
fire and hail, snow and wind and storm.
On You we have hoped and we were not ashamed!

As midnight approached, their song grew more feeble. Then a strange thing happened. One of the forty staggered toward shore, fell to his knees and began crawling toward the bathhouse. "Thirty-nine good soldiers for Christ!" came the weakening, trembling song from the distance. The jailer watched the man enter the bathhouse and emerge quickly, apparently overcome by the heat, then collapse on the ground and expire. The other guards could not believe what they saw next. The jailer ripped off his armor and coat, dashed to the edge of the lake, lifted his right hand and cried, "Forty good soldiers for Christ!" then disappeared over the ice into the darkness.

All forty were dead by the next day, but it was the jailer who caught the captain's notice as their bodies were being carted away. "What is he doing here?" he demanded. "We cannot

understand it, Captain. Ever since those Christians came under his care, we noticed something different about him." The martyrs of Sebaste had patiently endured suffering, and their testimony had a profound impact on that jailor who watched them. Our patient endurance can affect the people around us who are watching our lives. Maybe we should pray, "Lord, give me patience, and do whatever you need to do in order to help me develop it."

The greatest example was our Lord Jesus Christ. "Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..." (1 Peter 2:23,24). All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Our sin puts us at odds with God, separates us from Him. That's why Jesus came, to make peace through the shedding of His blood on the cross. He reaches out in love to us. We need to turn in repentance and receive Him as personal Saviour, accept God's forgiveness and the eternal life that He offers. You're encouraged to trust Him, now!

¹Commentary: The Epistles to the Thessalonians, C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine Bible study Clinics, 1959, p.183,184.

²Commentary: The Behavior of Belief, Part III, Spiros Zodhiates, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966, p.89.