

Patience

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[0 : 0 0] Well, the Battle of Waterloo was fought on the 18th of June, 1815, and it concluded a 23-year war. I was reading about the Battle of Waterloo this week, so I thought I'd just share you some of the knowledge I've learned.

The Duke of Wellington and his combined armies defeated Napoleon and his army. And for that battle, Napoleon's plan was that he would defeat the British army, and then the Prussian army would come and he would defeat them before they could join forces together.

Wellington's plan was different. Wellington was going to wait with his weaker army until the Prussian army arrived, and they would combine forces and join, and they would then defeat Napoleon.

That was the plan. And so Wellington just essentially let his army be pounded all day by Napoleon until the Prussians arrived later on in the day.

And then the Allied army could then mount its attack on Napoleon. And so they stood firm for the whole day until the Prussians got there later on, and then together, together they defeated Napoleon.

[1 : 1 0] And it looked like Napoleon had won late on in the afternoon, but then when evening came, he was soundly defeated by Wellington and his combined army.

So Wellington's battle plan essentially was to be patient, to stand firm, wait until help arrived.

And that is essentially the message of these verses from our Bible reading in James chapter 5.

James says, Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.

So James is essentially saying here, be patient and stand firm and wait. Now, what James had said before in chapter 5, verse 1 to 6, he was speaking to the unbelieving rich who were oppressing the poor, oppressing other people.

And so he was warning against the judgment that the unbelieving rich oppressors would face. And now he follows on in chapter 5, verse 7, to address those who are being oppressed.

[2 : 1 6] So he's spoken about those oppressors, and now he's speaking about the oppressed, the believers, Christian believers, because he calls them brothers and sisters. And what he does is he urges them to be patient.

He urges them to stand firm because the Lord, the judge, is coming. And so James here isn't denying the reality of suffering for God's people.

People suffer. But he wants to tell us how best to handle our suffering. He wants to help us to know best how to cope and deal with it. He essentially gives his readers a battle plan, if you like.

And it involves being patient, standing firm, and waiting. Being patient now, remaining steadfast and standing firm, and waiting until the Lord comes again.

Because he is coming to judge. And as judge, James is assuring us that God will deliver his people, and he will judge the enemies of his people and condemn them.

[3 : 2 0] And so James essentially, in these verses, wants us to know who Jesus is and what Jesus will do in the future. So that we can be patient and persevere in the present.

So he's saying, look to the future. See who is coming and what he will do. And that will help you know how to live your life right now. And so how do we develop this kind of patience, this perseverance that James speaks of?

Well, we're going to look at this passage under three headings. First of all, we're going to look at the command to be patient. Secondly, we're going to look at the examples of patience. And then thirdly, the motivation for patience.

So the command to be patient, the examples of patience, and then the motivation for patience. So first, the command to be patient is there in verse 7 to 9.

Let me read verse 7 again. Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop. Patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

[4 : 28] So he's saying, be patient because Jesus will return. And that's when Jesus will vindicate his suffering people. Now, what is the kind of waiting that James is talking about here?

Because there are different kinds of waiting. So what he's not talking about is the kind of uncertain waiting where you're not sure whether something will happen or not.

Kind of like we're just not sure whether Scotland will one day be an independent country. Not that kind of waiting. Or maybe waiting to see if Rangers will ever win anything again.

Uncertain waiting. Just not sure whether it is ever going to happen. That's not the kind of waiting that James is talking about here. He's talking about a kind of waiting for something that is certain in the future.

Something that will definitely happen. So much so, it is so certain it's going to happen that it then, by default, shapes how we live our lives today.

[5 : 30] In the here and now. And so James is saying, because the Lord is coming, then you can be patient in the present. Now, the phrase, the Lord's coming, is a powerful one because it tells us not only that Jesus is coming, but also who he is and what he will do.

So James wants us to be confident and sure in who Jesus is. Who does he say Jesus is? Well, he calls him Lord. So Jesus is Lord. And that means that Jesus is in charge of absolutely everything. So he rules and he reigns in heaven right now. He is the boss. He's Lord. And yet, when he comes in the future, he's also judge.

So he will sort everything out. So James refers to Jesus as the Lord. But also, verse 9, Jesus is also the judge. So Jesus could not possibly be any more powerful.

If you're Lord and judge, there is no equal. And so can you see why James wants us to grasp who Jesus is, Lord, and what he is going to do, judge, to help us get a grasp, get a handle on suffering in this life.

[6 : 50] Because if we grasp what he's saying here, then it will impact suffering in life right now. And it doesn't mean that suffering doesn't matter, but we can patiently endure because the Lord and judge will fix everything when he comes.

That's the Christian hope. And so James gives us the picture of a farmer to teach us the need for this kind of patience. Farming is hard work.

I don't know, but gardening is hard work. And farming is a lot harder than gardening. So farming is hard work. But yet, when the work is done, when the farmer has done his job, he's got to wait patiently for the rain to then do its work.

And so the autumn rain comes. It's supposed to soften the ground so he can sow the seed. Then the spring rain comes. It helps the growth of the crop before it is ready.

And so the farmer has got to patiently wait for the harvest, waiting for the rain again and again for it to do its job. And so there's nothing the farmer can do about the situation.

[7 : 56] When he's done his work, he just has to patiently wait. He's got to submit himself to God's timetable and God's way of working. And so what James is saying here is we have got to wait patiently for Jesus to come.

We've got to submit to God's timetable and trust God's way of working. And so there's no point the farmer getting frustrated because it isn't raining. He's just got to wait.

So there are things that are outwith our control. And we may not fully see or fully understand what God is doing. And we don't need to.

So like the farmer, we have to be patient. And along with this command to be patient, there's also a need to stand firm. That's what James says in verse 8.

So just as he urged us to be patient because of the Lord's coming, he's also saying you need to be patient because of the nearness of the Lord's coming.

[9 : 03] So what does it mean to say that the Lord's coming is near? Well, it means that the return of Jesus is essentially the next event in God's calendar.

Jesus is coming in near because his coming is the next part of God's salvation plan. So God has a plan in world history to accomplish salvation for his people.

And it included the coming of Jesus. But the next part of his plan, now that Jesus has come, is the return of Jesus. And we don't know when it's going to be.

And so that's why James tells his readers to stand firm. Literally, he says, strengthen your hearts. So we need to remain steadfast. We need to strengthen our hearts, even in suffering, and be determined not to give up.

Why? Because the Lord's coming is near. We don't know when. It could be tomorrow. Just like a football team who are leading in a game. They're winning.

[10:06] And all they need to do is hold on until the 90 minutes are up. And then victory will be assured. And I've seen it happen with Partick Thistle. So many times that they have been in the lead.

They just need to hold on. There's not long to go in the game. And if they hold on, they will win. And sometimes they do. Yesterday, they didn't hold on.

And they drew. It's not as bad as losing, but they needed to win. Anyway, that's the sense of Jesus, sorry, James' words here. He's essentially saying, well, we are on the Lord's team.

We're on the winning side. And we need to withstand the pressure to keep going until the final whistle. Except it won't be a whistle when Jesus comes back. It will be a trumpet that will sound. And so it's an awareness of this certain future that helps us keep going, standing firm, remaining steadfast in the present. And so the Lord Jesus will return in the future.

[11:08] James says, so stand fast now. And there's another instruction with this standing fast, standing firm. It's there in verse 9. He says, Now, it may seem disconnected to what James has just said about not grumbling and being patient.

How are they connected together? And yet, you notice when you read the letter of James that our speech is one of James' constant issues that we need to deal with.

And so this does connect with being patient. Because grumbling most often happens when things are difficult. When we're under pressure.

Or when we're suffering in some way. When we're facing difficult circumstances. Or when we're frustrated. What happens? Well, we grumble. And we complain. And we often take it out on other people, don't we?

We stop being patient. We stop trusting God. And we grumble. And who bears the brunt of our grumbling? Well, it's normally those who are closest to us, isn't it?

[12:19] Our family. Our wife. Our husband. Our children. They're the ones that we are impatient with. They're the ones that we take it out on. And so it's a problem because when we open our mouths to grumble against others, what we do is we take on the role of judge.

So we're not being patient. We decide to take matters into our own hands and act as the judge. And yet that is never our role. There is only one judge.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the only judge. And so that's his role. And so who do we think we are that we've got the right to judge others as if we are perfect when we aren't?

And so James tells us we shouldn't grumble or we'll be judged. And he reminds us that Jesus the judge is standing at the door. I wonder if you've ever had one of those awkward moments when you have walked into a room and the conversation just dies, stops suddenly.

And you realize that the people in the room have been talking about you. Or maybe it's just me. And you know that if they knew you were standing outside the door or were about to come in, then the talk and the temperature in the room would be slightly different.

[13:40] And so what James is saying here is if you knew that Jesus was standing at the door, if you knew that his coming was soon and was near, then it would change how you behave.

It would change what you say. It would change how you act. But what he's saying is that Jesus could come back and he will instantly burst the door open and confront us as the judge.

And so as judge, Jesus will take account of all that we say and do. And that's why we're commanded to be patient here and to live our lives accordingly in the here and now.

And that's how we're ready for the coming of Jesus is to submit to him now and live as we should. And so that's the first thing. It's the command to be patient.

Secondly, there are the examples of patience there in verse 10 and 11. So after James urges his readers to be patient, well, they might be thinking, well, what does that look like?

[14:43] So he gives some examples to flesh it out. And the first example he gives is the prophets. Verse 10. Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

So the prophets in general, he's saying, were characterized by patience in the face of suffering. And he doesn't name any names, but perhaps he wants us to think of prophets like, say, Isaiah. Because God sent Isaiah to preach his message to a group of people. And over 20 to 30 years, nobody would believe Isaiah. But he persevered in his ministry.

Or there's the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was faithful in proclaiming God's message. And yet he suffered for it. He suffered at the hands of pagan kings.

He even suffered at the hands of his own people. He was mocked, beaten, and imprisoned. And yet he persevered in his ministry. Or there's the prophet Hosea.

[15:49] God told Hosea to marry a woman who'd be a prostitute and an adulterer. And that was part of Hosea's ministry training. And so he married Gomer. And she was unfaithful to him.

And it was really so Hosea could understand a little of how God felt at his people's unfaithfulness to him. And then God told Hosea to love her and to take her back.

And that's essentially how Hosea's life played out. He suffered greatly. It wasn't easy. But he kept going. And that's James' point.

The prophets didn't exactly have easy lives. And they did some strange things. And yet it was part of what God wanted them to do.

And so they suffered despite their obedience to God. And that's not really what you'd expect, is it? And so James is urging us to be patient in the face of suffering just like the prophets were.

[16:52] Because their perseverance actually developed through their suffering. They learned how to persevere when they were faced with suffering and trials.

And so if you profess to be a Christian, if you're a follower of Jesus, let's never be surprised by suffering. It's not a case of if you suffer, but when you suffer.

And it might be suffering because you follow Jesus Christ. Many people in our world face severe persecution, even death, because they follow Jesus.

And of course, that's not us here in the UK. And yet at the same time, we do feel more opposition for our Christian beliefs.

Just think of how the SNP leadership election played out and how Kate Forbes was abused because of her Christian values. Or think of the Scottish government plans to ban the so-called conversion therapy, which will likely just end up in legislating against Orthodox Christian beliefs.

[18:04] So that's one kind of suffering. It's oppression. It's persecution for what you believe. And yet we're all aware that there are so many other kinds of different sufferings that impact our lives.

And James was writing here to suffering believers, to people who knew what it was like to suffer.

And so James is well aware of how suffering does impact all of us.

Sadness, grief, hurt, loss, sorrow, tears. They're never far away, are they? And suffering is real.

It's very real. And it's painful. And that's why James wants to help us. And so what he's saying here, he's not saying in some kind of cold and detached way with an easy answer to suffering.

No, instead, it's more like he's talking with an arm around our shoulder, an arm around the shoulder of his readers. With an awareness that suffering is hard.

[19:08] It's painful. But also with a way to make sense of it. A way to handle it and cope with it.

Because it is hard knowing how to handle suffering, especially if there seems to be no reason for the suffering.

And I think that's why James brings Job into the discussion in verse 11. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered.

You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. So Job is given here as the ultimate example of patience in the face of innocent suffering.

And he's considered blessed along with others because he persevered. He didn't give up. He kept going. And we may not think that Job is a good model of patience and perseverance and suffering. But James says he is. Because, well, when we think about Job, we might think that Job was often impatient. After all, he cursed the day of his birth. And he also needed to repent of speaking wrongly of God.

[20:28] And I think that means we can often have a wrong idea of patience and what it means to be patient. As if being patient means sitting back, saying nothing, doing nothing, watching the world go by, and just hoping somehow that everything is going to work out okay in the end.

And yet that wasn't Job, was it? That wasn't the example that he gave to us. Job's patience was never passive. Job prayed to God.

Job questioned God in his confusion. And so his patience was basically seen in his gutsy determination to endure his suffering.

He would not give up. He clung onto God. And in the end, he was commended by God. And surely that's what James wants us to grasp here.

With Job, he says that we have seen what the Lord finally brought about. Did you see that in verse 11? In other words, the Lord had a purpose in Job's suffering, even if Job didn't see it at the time.

[21 : 38] God brought ultimate blessing through his suffering. So Job's life is proof, as James says, that the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

God was working his purpose out in Job through all his suffering. And that's why Job's perseverance is held out by James as an example of patience in the face of suffering.

It's meant to be an encouragement to us so that we can keep going because of what the Lord will finally bring about in our lives. We can't see it yet, but we can trust that he will bring it about.

And so the message of James here is that God does have a purpose. And God is compassionate and merciful. And so just as we see the purpose of God in the lives of the prophets by looking back at them after their lives, for them in the midst of their lives, they probably didn't see the purpose of what they were going through.

But just as we can look back and see how God had a purpose in their suffering, in their lives, so we might struggle to see the purpose of suffering in our lives right now.

[22 : 53] But that doesn't mean that God doesn't have a purpose. And then whilst we're in the midst of it, we're not going to see it. But as we look back, then we will. And so that's why there's this need to persevere, trusting that God will finally bring about his purpose.

Sinclair Ferguson, one of the commentators on James, says this. He says, The scriptures give us hindsight on the lives of others so that we may have foresight on our own.

And so we know the purpose of the Lord and the life stories of the prophets. So, of course, the Lord will have a purpose in your life story too, and my life story, because he knows what he is doing.

And that really is the only comfort we can have in our suffering. An atheistic, secular perspective has no answer to suffering.

The Christian perspective, the Christian belief does. And so even though we don't know what the Lord will bring about right now, he is full of compassion.

[24 : 04] He is full of mercy. And he is working out his purpose. And the only way we can be patient and stand firm is to believe that, that he does have a purpose.

And that's not to downplay or dismiss any of the suffering that any of us go through. But it's to say that it's the best way to handle it, to know that God has a purpose.

And it may only be that when Jesus comes back again, that we'll be able to understand why, and also why it was worth it. And so the key for James is not to focus on the suffering, but to focus on the Lord, who is full of compassion and mercy, and to know how the Lord works, to know how he works.

So that's the second point, the examples of patience. First, the command to be patient. Second, the examples of patience. And third, the motivation for patience. And on this, we close.

So verse 12 says, Now, it might seem like a sharp gear change here, and as if this has got no connection to what James has just said.

[25 : 27] But it does follow on because of James' words, above all, as he starts verse 12. And what he says here is an echo of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. So it's about our speech again, and it's about the truth of what we say.

Because we should be people whose words can be trusted. But what place does our speech have here? Well, perhaps James wants to tell us and to remind us that our suffering and our speech go together.

And we need patience for both, because both are areas where we so badly get it wrong. And how we handle suffering or approach suffering and also in what we say.

Because suffering will test us to the max. There's no greater pressure in our lives than suffering.

And so while we may have spoken in the past boldly about our vows, our oaths, what we profess to believe, what we confess, like we said, the Apostles' Creed there, although we may have spoken in the past boldly about all of that, when suffering comes, the test will be in how we handle the

suffering.

Will it match up to what we profess we believe? I think that's what James is saying here. Because in the furnace of suffering, standing firm means what we believe will be matched in how we live our lives and how we handle our suffering.

[26 : 55] Well, why does it matter? Why does James need to mention this? Well, it is because the judge is near.

He's standing at the door. He is coming. Jesus one day will come. And so we have got to view all of our lives from that perspective. And that's why all of this is motivation for patience and for perseverance in the present.

So right now, in the present, we may be suffering. And yet James is saying, well, you may be suffering, but remember one day when Jesus returns as judge, he will sort everything out.

He will put everything right. As much as we can't get our heads around that right now, it will happen because he is the perfect judge. And so he's never going to get it wrong, is he?

Jesus will bring perfect justice, perfect peace, perfect healing. And isn't that the hope that we need in our suffering right now?

[28 : 04] And so then, how can we patiently persevere until all of this happens, until Jesus the judge returns? Well, we can't do it ourselves. It's impossible.

But there is one who went before us, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is the judge. And yet Jesus came to face the ultimate suffering for us.

Jesus suffered and died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. He took the ultimate suffering on the cross to save us from hell, which is far worse than any suffering we'll face in this life.

And so Jesus is the ultimate prophet. He's the supreme example of patience and perseverance in the face of suffering. Jesus went through all of this.

And so some of those who watched and looked on as Jesus died on the cross, they mocked him and said he saved others. Let him save himself.

[29 : 11] And yet despite his supreme power and his supreme authority as Lord and judge, Jesus stayed on the cross. Why? For you and for me.

To save us. And so the writer to the Hebrews says this in chapter 12. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. And then he goes on to say, Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. And so we can be patient.

And whatever suffering we face now, because Jesus has already suffered the greatest possible suffering in our place to save us.

And it's only when we grasp this in our heads and it sinks into our hearts that we're able to be patient and endure whatever suffering we face. Because when Jesus came first, Jesus came to bear our judgment.

[30 : 20] But when Jesus comes again, Jesus will come to bring judgment. And that's why this is so important if you don't know Jesus and wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

Because responding to Jesus in repentance and faith, it's not something you should be patient about. There's an urgency about needing to go to Jesus.

If he is the judge who will return at any time, he'll judge us all. And so we need to be ready. So don't wait any longer. If you don't know Jesus, meet him now.

Meet him as your Lord. Meet him as your Savior before you meet him as judge.