

James 5:1-11.

Many of the letters in the New Testament were written to people familiar with suffering. James' letter was no exception. In this final chapter he told his readers to endure. Why? Because Christ is coming back again.

“Did I believe in God? Now the test had come. I was alone. There was no salary to earn, no golden opinions to consider. God offered me only suffering—would I continue to love Him?” This was the question with which Richard Wurmbrand wrestled. He was a pastor taken prisoner in 1948, Communist Romania.

Russia created the Eastern Bloc when WWII came to a close. It was a zone of dictatorships dominated by Moscow. Romania descended into the Bloc when Soviet loyalists held her king at gunpoint. They then imprisoned, exiled, or executed protestors, drained the country's resources, nationalized her banks, eliminated private property, and reorganized society. Romania plunged into an abyss from which she didn't escape for another 42 years.

Wurmbrand continued preaching from the Bible, evangelizing, and ministering as if nothing had changed. The new regime responded by placing him in solitary confinement for three years (complete silence, total darkness). This was followed by years of psychological and physical tortures as the Soviets attempted to break men and women like him.

Altogether the pastor spent 11 ½ years suffering unjustly before a sum was paid for his release. He eventually moved to the United States where he continued to minister and even founded a ministry, *The Voice of the Martyrs*. After all he had experienced, his love for and his devotion to Christ deepened.

Endurance like this isn't the product of a shallow kind of faith. It builds with the conviction that what God has said remains true. If you look at Noah, he endured ridicule and weariness to build an ark. Why? Because he believed what God had said about judgment would come to pass (Heb 11:7). Abraham is another example: He turned his back on all he had ever known in Mesopotamia. Why? Because he believed the Lord would keep His promises (Heb 11:9-10). Moses had a life of luxury and ease in the Pharaoh's palace. He gave it all up because God was his great treasure (Heb 11:24-27). The Lord called Moses, and said He would keep His promise to deliver His people. Moses endured.

Noah, Abraham, and Moses didn't know exactly what would happen each day. They faced monumental hardships and suffered unjustly in ways. As with Wurmbrand, the conviction that God is true kept them going. The Lord had promised something about the distant future. They believed, and so they endured.

Hebrew 12:1-2—“Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

James encouraged his audience in a similar way as he begins the final chapter of his letter. His audience of Jewish Christians were poor and easily exploited. Suffering at the hands of wealthy landlords, James encouraged them to endure the present in light of a glorious future.

MONEY PROBLEMS

(JAMES 5:1-6)

Agriculture was the backbone of the Roman Empire. In fact, over 90% of the entire population was peasant families who farmed. Some owned a small plot of their own and worked it. Most couldn't. They contracted themselves out to large landowners who paid a wage or provided shelter.

Certain religious leaders, political figures, members of royalty, or distinguished soldiers tended to be the landowners. None of these groups would have had a heart for impoverished Christians. Political figures and Roman royalty increasingly disdained any who would worship as God a crucified man. Religious leaders and soldiers held the same disdain for Christians. Being Jewish didn't help. To the Romans, the Jews were no more than a conquered people. It isn't hard to see how one group might exploit the other.

Before James said anything encouraging, he excoriated these wealthy landowners. No, they probably wouldn't be at church hearing from him. He knew that, but he rebuked them anyways. Why? To remind these poor Christians that God knows. He knows their plight, and a day is coming when the unrighteous will answer for their deeds. In this case, they were hoarding and defrauding. It's wrong to hoard, but stealing to increase your hoard is even worse.

So, James 5 begins on a harsh note: “Come now, you rich, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming upon you.” Life may look good

Patient Endurance

at the present; it won't look so good in the future when "the Lord of armies" takes action (Jas 5:4). James uses this imagery to warn of God Almighty doing battle for the weakest of His people. He may not rise up and act today but all things, even the judgement of the wicked, come about in His time.

These rich land owners had far more money than they had any plans to use (Jas 5:5). It's wasted wealth, riches sitting idle without any real purpose. The irony James draws our attention to is that the value of earthly wealth tends toward zero (Jas 5:2, 3). Why cling to it? All things lose their value with time, and even what doesn't won't matter to us when we draw our last breath.

**"LOSE MONEY FOR THE SAKE OF A BROTHER OR A FRIEND,
AND LET IT NOT RUST UNDER A STONE."**

— JEWISH PROVERB.

James was appalled by the exploitation of God's people: "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud" (Jas 5:4). These landowners weren't like ValJean stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's child. They had an abundance, wanted more, and wanted it bad enough to defraud their workers.

Rome wasn't known for its labor laws. Sure, the worker could quit... and then face starvation. He could even be drug into court to be further humiliated (James 2:6). This is why James thundered: "You have condemned and murdered the righteous person" (Jas 5:6). When a man needs his wage to survive, withholding it is devastating. It may not be far off from actually taking that man's life.

ONE DAY, BUT NOT YET

(JAMES 5:7-11)

James 5:7—"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord."

Their plight was severe, but James writes: "Be patient." And he says it twice in these verses. He identifies with these poor believers in verses 1-6. God knows their pain, hears their cries for help, and the wicked will answer for their crimes. But what are these believers to do in the meantime? Should they strike back or lash out? No, for the Lord has said, "Vengeance is mine" (Deut 32:35). Wait.

No one likes waiting, especially not for justice. In fact, many of the Lord's people have died waiting for Him to act. Was it a waste? Not

at all. Sometimes the Lord destroys the wicked in this life; sometimes He doesn't. James helps us look to the distant future: Be patient in the midst of suffering "until the coming of the Lord."

Psalm 94:14—"For the Lord will not forsake His people."

But that might be a very long time! It may be, but the end is absolutely certain. Whether Christ comes today or in a thousand years, it makes no difference. I think of Amos who 2,500 years ago yearned for the future saying: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). It's the same scene these poor laborers reading James' letter would've wanted. They longed for justice, and like Amos, James understood a day was coming when the Lord would right the wrongs. Things will not be as they are forever. Christ is coming. "Fix your heart" upon it (Jas 5:8). With that hope so firmly set, be patient.

The kind of patience James writes about is akin to endurance. The original word conveys a slowness to boil over in anger. Be so slow that the heat of a trial may last for months, even years, but you as a Christian remain cool to the touch. Have a fuse so long that nothing can cause an explosion of rage. James calls upon these Christians to endure in a way that they don't even grumble about their trials (Jas 5:9).

James appeals to are the prophets and Job as examples of "suffering and patience" (v. 10). Jeremiah was thrown into a pit, Elijah fled for his life, John the Baptist was thrown into prison and then martyred. *Look at the prophets—they suffered unjustly, too!* They stood against overwhelming opposition and had the chance to quit many times over, but they didn't. Their faith strengthened as steel grows stronger with heat treatments. They are examples because when they could've given up, they didn't. They suffered injustice and endured to the end.

Job didn't suffer unjustly, but he reminds us of God's sovereign control and great mercy. It's tempting to wonder if God sees or even cares when we're hurting. David fell into this despair at times: "Will the Lord spurn forever... Has His steadfast love forever ceased... Has God forgotten to be gracious?" (Psa 77:7-9). It feels like that at times, doesn't it? Job felt that way, but in the end we see God blessing Job with more than he ever lost. James wanted his readers to remember God is still compassionate and merciful (Jas 5:11). They may not see it in this life, but Christ is coming. Set your heart upon it, my friend.