

James 5:7-12

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Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. We respond when we meet injustice.

Well, James' readers were used to injustice. Back in chapter 2, verse 6, James says, the rich are the ones dragging you off into court, harassing you. We go into that again at the end of verse 6 of chapter 5.

[2 : 19] Some of the poor Christians in this church were being exploited, treated unjustly. The powerless poor were helpless. It's exactly the situation that many of our brothers and sisters around the world find themselves in, like that church in Algeria, with apparently no records, where apparently Judge Hategood is in control of the court, to go back to Vanity Fair.

So how are we to respond to that kind of injustice? What are we to do? How are James' readers to respond? Well, James has just been highlighting, verses 1 to 6, a way not to respond.

Not to envy the wealthy and the powerful, because they're going to lose everything. Their money will rot. They will be judged. Not to emulate the envy, the powerful and wealthy, because that will not last.

It will not go anywhere. This is God's world. It does not belong to the elites. It does not belong to the powerful nations, or the powerful businesses, or the powerful presidents.

It is God's world. He is in control of it. And the Lord Jesus will come back to judge. That's really the point of verses 1 to 6 we looked at this morning. Judgment is coming.

[3 : 36] So how then should we live? Well, James tells two things. to us, and these believers, and these verses. And the first is to live patiently, because of the gospel hope. Live patiently.

I'm sure you caught that in the reading. Look at verse 7. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for precious fruits of the earth, being patient about it. And again in verse 8, he will say, be patient. James is saying, Christ will return. A day will come where everything is put right. So be patient. Wait patiently for that day.

Now does that mean, be passive, do nothing? Well no, look at the illustration he uses. The patient farmer, verse 7. See how the farmer waits for precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until he receives the early and late rains.

Now what can the farmer do to hasten the harvest? Nothing. He can't do anything, can he? That's all in God's control.

[4 : 39] When the rains come, how the harvest grows, that's God's job. The farmer has to wait patiently. So why does he wait? Because it's a precious crop. It's something he values, it's something he's looking forward to.

And how does the farmer wait? Is he passive? Does he do nothing? Well I'm sure we all know farmers, even in a city like this, we might not know farmers locally, but perhaps we know some farmers, or at least know something about farmers.

It's not like they sit there and do nothing all the time until harvest, is it? There's work to be done to kind of tend the crops, to keep off the birds that will eat them, to kill off the weeds that will grow up. They're not passive.

They do things to facilitate the crop, don't they? They cooperate with the growth of the harvest, as they wait patiently for it. And as Christians, that's how we are to respond to the trials and difficulties of our own lives.

Be it injustice we experience, or the everyday difficulties that can affect anyone and everyone. So if you remember how James started this later, it's worth turning back to chapter 1, verses 2 to 4.

[5 : 48] Count it all joy, my brothers, when you need trials of various kinds. How can we keep trials as joy? Here's the reason. For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and that steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

See, there is the harvest that trials produce in our own lives. Steadfastness, that as we cooperate with it, makes us perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So there's what God, in his grace, wants to achieve in our lives. He wants us to cooperate with that, with patience, as he produces this harvest of steadfastness, and of maturity, and completeness in our lives.

So how exactly do we do that? How are we able to wait patiently? I find it hard enough to wait patiently for a bus when it's late. I only wait patiently during trials. Well, look at what James tells us in verse 8.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Establish your hearts. A couple of weeks ago, during the half-term break, Mary, my wife, took the kids down to her mother in Hampshire for a few days while our kitchen was being ripped apart.

[7 : 02] And on their way back, they got a flat tyre on the M3, and so had to pull in just before the M3-M25 junction. And Zoe, being seven years old, was somewhat upset and perturbed by the fact they're now standing next to a big motorway with cars flying past.

I suspect we can all sympathise with her. So what did Mary all have to do in that situation? I don't phone the ADA, she had to try and establish Zoe's heart by reminding her of the truth of the fact the AA man was going to come and they were going to be top of the priority list because a single female with two young children and so the guy came pretty quickly.

But her job was to reassure her with the truth of the closeness of the coming of a rescuer. To reassure her. We even have a greater truth, a more imminent arrival to look forward to.

The coming of the Lord is at hand says James. So to establish ourselves in that truth. He is ready to appear. He is close by.

The judge will come to vindicate his people. He's at hand in the sense that he has nothing else to do. Nothing else for God to complete on his to-do list other than send the Lord Jesus back.

[8 : 16] He is ready to be revealed, ready to come. So James says establish your hearts as you wait for his return. If you're building up a fence, what do you do?

You have to dig down deep to put the fence pole in to make sure it's firm and well established.

That's the idea here, to establish, to get this firmly fixed, get our hearts firmly fixed in this truth.

So how do we do that? Well, Paul writing for Romans, Romans 16, 25, says that God is able to establish the same words, establish or strengthen our hearts according to the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 3, verse 2, Paul sends Timothy to the church in Thessalonica to establish and exhort them in the faith. It's the same word again. Do you see how we get established? Do you see how our hearts get established?

It's by the gospel. It's by feeding on the gospel. It's by listening to the gospel, by speaking the truth of the gospel to one another, by gathering around the Lord's table as he strengthens our hearts, using the bread and wine to strengthen our faith as bread strengthens our bodies for life.

[9 : 32] Through speaking the gospel to one another, through meditating on the great gospel promises, we establish our hearts in this truth that the Lord Jesus is coming back. Indeed, the Lord God Almighty establishes our hearts.

That's what Paul prays for for the Thessalonians later on in 1 Thessalonians 3. So first, we establish our hearts so the hope of the return of the Lord Jesus becomes more real to us.

But also, as our hearts are established in the gospel, we are less shocked by the horrors and injustices of the world, aren't we? Francis Schaeffer said that a Christian should never have the reaction designated by the word shocked to anything.

Why? Because if we believe the gospel, if we understand the gospel, then we know the depravity, the evil, within our own hearts naturally. And so nothing about the world will shock or surprise us. People who do not understand the gospel, the average secular person on the street is horrified by injustice in the Middle East, horrified by child abuse scandals of Jimmy Savile and the like.

[10 : 47] They're right to be horrified, but they don't understand it. They have a category for it.

Why? Because they do not have a category for sin. If we understand the gospel, if our hearts are established in the gospel, then no evil in the world will shock us because we know what we are

capable of.

We know the evil we have been redeemed from by our Lord Jesus. We know the sin of our own hearts. So we need to establish our hearts in the gospel so we're not surprised and shocked on the one hand by pain and injustice, but also on the other hand so we have hope.

So we remember firmly the Lord Jesus will come back and we'll put everything right. That one day every tear will be wiped from the eyes of Jesus' people. But the question for all of us here is, are our hearts established in the gospel?

What are you and I putting our hope in? What are we putting our hope in? During all those floods and storms that we had and the snow that was coming to New York a few months ago, people are often told to get out of their houses because it was going to be dangerous or there were tornadoes coming through the area.

People are told to get out, get somewhere safe. The question for us is, are we standing somewhere safe? Given this judgment is coming, given Jesus the judge is at the door, at hand, ready to come back, are we somewhere safe?

[12:18] What do we put our hope in? What makes you feel safe? The fact you're better than others? The fact you're not like those people over there? The fact that you've been to church?

The fact that you try to be a nice person, you're open minded, you try to treat people fairly? Where is it you put your hope? The way that judgment comes, you will not be destroyed but saved.

The truth is none of us live up to our own standards, do we? Let alone live up to God's standards.

So if we're going to be safe when a righteous, perfect judge comes back, we need to make sure that our sin has already been paid for, otherwise we will pay for it ourselves.

God has provided a way for that. The Lord Jesus came to earth to live the life that I could never live, that you could never live. He died a death on the cross that we deserve to die and was raised to new life, to offer forgiveness and life to each one of us.

So there is a safe place to be and that safe place is in the Lord Jesus, to turn to him in faith and in repentance, turning from living our own way, with all our selfishness, with all our judgmentalism towards others who don't meet our standards, and to come to Jesus and say, I am a rebel, I need your forgiveness, I need you to be my king, please take my sin and let me be yours.

[13:52] So that's a safe place to stand, we're to establish our hearts in that truth. faith. So that's the first way we live in a world of injustice and suffering, we live patiently because of the gospel hope, the hope of sins forgiven and eternal life to come where every tear is wiped away.

But there's a second thing James says as well, if we're living patiently with the gospel hope, how would you expect that to be seen? How do you expect James to carry on here?

I guess I'd expect it to be seen in our ambitions, our attitudes, what our goals in life are. But James has something very different to say. He says that hope will be seen, that patience will be seen in the way we speak, in our words.

So firstly, we're to live patiently in the gospel hope, and secondly, we're to speak with integrity because of the gospel hope. We're to speak with integrity. So speech has been a big issue for James all the way through this letter.

So if you follow it through for a moment, chapter 1, verse 26, James says, if anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

[15:10] He goes on, chapter 3, verse 8, says that no human being, it's on the same page, no human being can control the tongue. No human being can tame the tongue, it is a restless evil full of deadly poison.

With it we bless our Lord and Father, with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be said.

Then chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, he warns about speaking evil against someone else, judging someone else. Anyone who does is judging the law, makes themselves a lawbreaker. See, for James, the way we use our tongues is all important.

Why? Well, it's because what Jesus said, Matthew 12, verse 34, it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. It's out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

So we can tell if we're living patiently, waiting patiently because of the gospel hope, because of the kind of things that we say. So let's look at what James says about the tongue there.

[16:19] Speak with integrity because of the gospel hope. He actually gives us two commands to speak with integrity in verses 9 and 12. First of all, do not grumble and secondly, do not swear.

Look at verse 9, first of all. Do not grumble. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged. Now that word translated grumbling is also used of groaning in other parts of the Bible.

So the word Paul uses in Romans chapter 8, 23, we're talking about the difficulties of life. We groan inwardly, waiting for the redemption of our bodies when Christ Jesus is revealed.

But that's a groaning upwardly to God in hope. Whereas here, James is talking about a groaning or a grumbling that goes out to one another. See, when we're under pressure, when life is difficult for us as individuals, who do we take it out on most?

It's the people closest to us, isn't it? If I'm having a stressful day, it's my wife and my children who sadly will get their brunt of it. Because that's what we're like. Under pressure, we say things to the people near us.

[17:29] And that's what James is commanding us not to do. And there are all sorts of reasons people could have groaned and grumbled against each other in this Christian community James is writing to. The poor could have grumbled against the rich who are often oppressing them.

The rich may have grumbled about the poor and didn't understand the pressures they were under. And in churches when life is hard it's very easy to grumble about other people. If only they would do what they're supposed to be doing.

If only they would play their part. If only they understood me. And grumbling is such an easy thing, isn't it? It's the lowest common denominator. I remember a place I used to work, every lunchtime pretty much, what was the conversation about in the workplace?

It was kind of good natured grumbling about the management or about the latest stupid bit of advertising the marketing department had put out or whatever it was. It was grumbling because it's so easy to find things to grumble about together.

Well at least it is if you're British anyway. That's kind of the way we are. But James says don't do it. Don't do it. Do not grumble against one another brothers so that you may not be judged.

[18:40] Behold the judge is standing at the door. I went to a boarding school for better or worse and in the door tree at night there would often be a lot of chat and people moaning about the teachers and moaning about one another as you'd imagine.

I still remember those horrible moments where we were talking to each other and saying what bad man our house master was and the door would open and he'd be standing there. And you think what have I just said?

What did he just hear? Oh no! Well that's the idea here. James is saying the judge is at the door. Now that's a good thing. He's at the door because he's going to put right what is wrong.

He'll put the end to all the oppression and injustice. But it also means he's listening into your conversations. Be careful how you speak. It's a reason to hope because he's close.

It's a reason to be careful. Now that doesn't mean that you say the wrong thing and you're going to miss out on eternal life. No, we're not saved by what we say or we don't say. We're saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith in Christ Jesus.

[19:45] But scripture is clear, there are some levels of rewards in one way or another. So we need to be careful in what we say. And James uses a couple of examples to help us to not grumble.

First of all, the example of the prophets, verse 10. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Now the Old Testament prophets often had a really hard time.

Jeremiah was so hated by the people he was put down a well and kind of left there to die, although someone else dug him back up again. There was a legend, a tradition had arisen by the first century that prophet Isaiah was sawn in two.

We'll read a bit about that in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 37. So prophets often suffered terrible injustice and yet how did they respond? They spoke in the name of the Lord, James says.

They spoke God's message. Very often that was denouncing the injustices of the day. But they spoke with integrity, speaking God's truth. So their patience certainly wasn't passive.

[20:51] It meant speaking out. And they suffered for that and yet James says, verse 11, behold we consider those blessed who remain steadfast. We look back on the Jeremiah's and the Isaiah's and the Amos's and the Hosea's of the day.

We consider them blessed now because their words were used to build up the church. So James is saying, keep persevering in the trials, speaking truth. I wonder, can you think of people in your own

lives?

I know I can. People who suffered greatly as Christians. Maybe through persecution, maybe through ill health. And yet their perseverance has been a blessing to others and we consider them blessed now.

Blessed by the Lord God who looked after them. So that's example one, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. The second example is Job, down there in verse 11. You've heard of the steadfastness of Job.

Now Job in some ways is an unusual example. If you've read the book of Job you'll know he's a man who's suffered hugely in many ways. Yet he spends a lot of time groaning. But Job's groaning was to the Lord rather than to other people most of the time.

[22 : 06] He groaned to the Lord in prayer rather than grumbling about those around him. And he spoke what was right. So for example, right at the beginning of the book, Job's wife tells him to curse God and die.

But he said to her, you speak as one other foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God and shall we not receive evil? In all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

And at the end of the book of Job, Job chapter 42 verse 7, as the Lord appears to Job, the Lord then turns to Job's comforters, who'd spoken lies all the way through, and says this to his comforters, to Eliphaz the Temanite, My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

See why James is using this example? With all the pressure, with all the suffering, with all his complaining to God, and praying to God, Job spoke what is right.

Not like his counsellors, who are mere moralists, who assumed Job must have done something wrong to be suffering. And we've got people like that today, don't we?

[23 : 23] The health and wealth prosperity gospel people, who will say if you're suffering, it's because you don't have enough faith. That's speaking a lie about God, it's not speaking with integrity because of the gospel hope.

Also some other theologians who will speak lies about God, trying to make life easier for people. So a few years ago there was a movement called the openness of God.

They said God isn't really in control of everything, God just kind of mix it up as he goes along. So if something bad happens to you, it's not God's brought that into your life, it's just God's going to pull a few other levers and make things work out a bit differently.

And what they were trying to do was kind of make God sound nicer or something. Yet what they were actually doing was distorting God's character.

They were not speaking the truth with integrity. But you see how James reminds us of God's character here. There's another reason for hope. You've seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

[24 : 30] And what was the purpose of the Lord? Well in Job's life, Job never found out the purpose. But the reader does at the end, Job chapter 42, he says of the Lord, I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear.

Now my eye has seen you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. What was the Lord's purpose in Job's life? So that Job could know the Lord better.

What is the Lord's purpose for suffering and injustice and trials in our lives? Miserable as they can be? That's what we read earlier from James chapter 1.

It is so that the testing of our faith will produce steadfastness and that steadfastness will get full effect. And we may be perfect and complete, lucky and nothing. See, God is compassionate. He will use trials and difficulties in our lives so they know him better and be perfect and complete. And the Lord's character is an encouragement in that.

[25 : 34] He is compassionate and merciful. So James says, don't grumble. Don't grumble. Speak with integrity because of the gospel hope and don't grumble.

And secondly, verse 12, do not swear. Above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your yes be yes, your no be no, so that you may not fall into condemnation.

Now why does James say that here? What's that going to do with suffering and trials and injustice? Well, it could be that some of the poor who are being oppressed by the rich would say, look, we promised to pay that debt.

I swear I'll pay it. And they would get themselves into even more difficulties. Or it may be people within the Christian community were promising, swearing to help one another, and then were failing to meet those demands.

Maybe even the rich were promising to let people off and they're not doing it. Truth is, we don't quite know if any one of those things are possible, aren't they? what can happen to us when we see people in difficulties?

[26 : 44] We can promise to help, but then fail to do it. Because we promise more than we can deliver. We can promise to pray, but then we fail to. See, what's underlying all this is the need to speak with integrity.

The Lord Jesus himself said, Matthew chapter 5, Do not swear by heaven or by earth. Do not take an oath by your head if you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say simply be yes or no.

Anything more than this comes from evil. The point is we're to be people of integrity, that we do what we say we'll do, whatever the pressure is upon us, because we're Jesus people, we're people who simply say yes or no.

We speak with integrity because of the gospel hope. And that is possible because as we trust in Jesus, we're made into new people. James said back in the beginning of the letter, chapter 1, verse 18, that God has brought us forth by the word of truth.

We might be a kind of first fruit of his new creatures. God is making us new through the gospel. So to speak with integrity because of the gospel hope, and to live patiently because of the gospel hope.

[28 : 02] because one day, Jesus is coming back. The judge is at the door. He is ready to come back. And what will happen when he does come back? Let me read to you from 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, a little reminder of what will happen on that day for all our oppressed brothers and sisters around the world.

What is going to come? Paul says there, they, those who oppress you, those who persecute you, will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord, from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all those who believed.

That is what is going to happen one day. The judge is at the door, ready to come back. the oppressors, the governments who oppress the church like that church in Algeria, will face judgment. Everyone who does not obey the gospel, as Paul puts it here, he will reflect vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who have not vowed before Jesus, the Lord, and repented and believed in him, will face judgment. So in the meantime, how do we live?

[29 : 31] We live with patience because of the gospel hope. The world will be put right when Jesus comes back. We speak with integrity because of the gospel hope. Because we are being made into new people through the word of truth.

And if you have not yet bowed the knee to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, then please do it now. The judge is at the door. Turn to him tonight before it is too late because he is coming. Let's pray. Let's pray.