THE POWER OF PATIENCE

James 5:7-12

Introduction:
James continues to address his fellow Jews who have been scattered abroad and are undergoing varying trials and tribulation and he is addressing us too today. Now he says to them "Be patient." Because the coming of the Lord is near when all these trials and tribulation will end. God is not going to right all the wrongs in this world until Jesus Christ returns, and we believers must patiently endure - and expect His coming.

Three times James reminds us of the coming of the Lord (James 5:7-9). This is the "blessed hope" of all Christian (Titus 2:13). We do not expect to have everything easy and comfortable in this present life because Jesus never promised us that, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Paul reminded his converts that "we must through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). We must patiently endure hardships and heartaches until Jesus returns.

But the question we must answer is: How can we as Christians experience this kind of patient endurance as we wait for the Lord to return? James gave us three encouraging examples of patient endurance to follow.

The Farmer (James 5:7-9)
An impatient person cannot be a farmer because harvest does not happen suddenly and quickly. Unlike stock exchange that raises people up and bring them down within seconds. He has to prepare the ground, prepare the crop, sow the seeds, wait patiently on Heavens to bring rain to grow and mature the seeds ready for harvest.

In this example, two things are important. First, the farmer has to do his best by selecting good soil, good seed to plant and do his best to keep the weeds under control and secondly, he has to wait on God to bring rain to make the crops grow and mature. Irrigation was not so common in those days. When they plant around October then the harvest starts around March-April. Any attempt to harvest before then, is futile and frustrating and this will be the results of impatience. He has to wait willingly and with expectation.

Why waiting for so long necessary? Because the fruit is best and precious at that time (James 5:7). The harvest is worth waiting for. "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).

James pictured the Christian as a "spiritual farmer" looking for a spiritual harvest. James 5:8 “You too, be patient and get established, because the Lord's coming is near.”

Our hearts are the soil, and the "seed is the Word of God" (Luke 8:11). There are seasons to the spiritual life just as there are seasons to the soil. Sometimes, our hearts become cold and wintry, and the Lord has to plough them up before He can plant the seed (Jeremiah 4:3). He sends the sunshine and the rains of His goodness to water and nurture the seeds planted; but we must be patient to wait for the harvest.

Here, then, is a secret of endurance when the going is tough: God is producing a harvest in our lives. He wants the "fruit of the Spirit" to grow (Gal 5:22-23), and the only way He can do it is through trials and troubles. Instead of growing impatient with God and complain and with ourselves and remain grumpy, we must yield to the Lord and permit the fruit to grow. We are "spiritual farmers" looking for a harvest.

You can enjoy this kind of a harvest only if your heart is established i.e. firm, steady and strong (James 5:8). This is the work of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the Pastors. The ministry of the Word of God and prayer are important if the heart is going to be established. A heart that is not established cannot bear fruit. It is the heart James refers to as double minded in Chapter 1.

Keep in mind that the farmer does not stand around doing nothing: he is constantly at work as he looks toward the harvest. James did not tell these suffering believers to fold their arms and wait for Jesus to return. "Keep working and waiting" was his admonition. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing" (Luke 12:43).

No matter what you are going through, and I want to tell you today that God is working it for your spiritual harvest, He is bringing it all to yield spiritual maturity and it is going to turn out well.

Is it about your work, your home, your spouse, your child or any other thing, God knows about it and He will see you through it. Do not ask God to remove it but pray that He helps you go through it and you will come out refined and mature.

"Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged" (James 5:9, NIV). Farmers do not have time for arguments or quarrels instead; they are always willing to help one another. Impatience with God
often leads to impatience with other Christians, and this is a sin we must avoid. If we start using the sickles on each other, we will miss the harvest!

**The Prophets (James 5:10)**
The other example James used are the Old Testament Prophets. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also used the prophets as an example of victory over persecution (Matt 5:10-12). What encouragements do we receive from their example?
For one thing, they were in the will of God, yet they suffered. They were preaching "in the name of the Lord," yet they were persecuted. Satan tells the faithful Christian that his suffering is the result of sin or unfaithfulness; and yet his suffering might well be because of faithfulness!
2 Timothy 3:12 “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”. NKJV
We must never think that obedience automatically produces ease and pleasure. Our Lord was obedient, and it led to a cross!
The prophets encourage us by reminding us that God cares for us when we go through sufferings for His sake. Elijah announced to wicked King Ahab that there would be a drought in the land for three and one half years; and Elijah himself had to suffer in that drought. But God cared for him, and God gave him victory over the evil priests of Baal. It has been said, "The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you."

Many of the prophets had to endure great trials and sufferings, not only at the hands of unbelievers, but also at the hands of professed believers. Jeremiah was arrested as a traitor and even thrown into an abandoned well to die. God fed Jeremiah and protected him throughout that terrible siege of Jerusalem, even though at times it looked as though the prophet was going to be killed. Both Ezekiel and Daniel had their share of hardships, but the Lord delivered them. And even those who were not delivered, who died for the faith, received that special reward for those who are true to Him. Peter, John, James, and Paul all had their share in this suffering.

Why is it that those who "speak in the name of the Lord" often must endure difficult trials? It is so that their lives might back up their messages. The impact of a faithful, godly life carries much power. We need to remind ourselves that our patience in times of suffering is a testimony to others around us.
But have not many faithful Christians suffered and died without any notice or recognition? Yes, but when Jesus returns, these "obscure heroes" will receive their rewards. The prophets were killed and buried, but today their names are honoured. When our Lord comes again, He will bring His reward with Him (Rev 22:12).
The example that James used from the Old Testament prophets ought to encourage us to spend more time in the Bible, getting acquainted with these heroes of faith.

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4, NIV). The better we know the Bible, the more God can encourage us in the difficult experiences of life. The important thing is that, like the farmer, we keep working, and, like the prophets, we keep witnessing, no matter how trying the circumstances may be.

**Job (James 5:11-12)**
The third example James used is Job. "As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered" (James 5:11, NIV). But you cannot persevere unless there is a trial in your life. There can be no victories without battles; there can be no peaks without valleys. If you want the blessing, you must be prepared to carry the burden and fight the battle.
A young Christian pray, "O Lord, please teach me the deep truths of Thy Word! I want to be lifted up to the heavens to hear and see the wonderful things that are there!" It was a sincere prayer, but the young man did not realise what he was praying. Paul went to the third heaven and learned things too marvellous for words; and as a result, God had to give Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble (2 Cor 12:1-10). God has to balance privileges with responsibilities, blessings with burdens, or else you and we will become spoiled, pampered children.
When do "blessings" come? In the midst of trials we may experience God's blessings, as did the three Hebrew in the fiery furnace (Dan 3); Daniel in the Lions’ den. But James taught that there is a blessing after we have endured. His example was Job.
Even though Job did not know what was going on in the spiritual realm between God and Satan, he did not deny God, he trusted him even at the height of his tribulation and calamity. Though Satan told God that Job
will curse God when calamity stuck him but he was lying (true to his nature), job did not. Even though Job’s friends accused him of hidden faults or unconfessed sins, they were wrong and God rebuked them later for this. His wife advised him to curse God and end his suffering but he did not take her advice. He lost his wealth, health and his beloved children and yet he remain faithful to God. Job trusted God and he said in Job 13:15-16 “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him!”

Certainly, there were other results from Job’s experience, for God never wastes the sufferings of His saints. Job met God in a new and deeper way (Job 42:1-6), and, after that, Job received greater blessings from the Lord. I pray that during and after your trouble you will know God deeper and closely.

What did Job’s story mean to the believers James wrote to, and what does it mean to us today? It means that some of the trials of life are caused directly by satanic opposition. God permits Satan to try His children, but He always limits the extent of the enemy’s power (Job 1:12; 2:6). When you find yourself in the fire, remember that God keeps His gracious hand on the thermostat! "But He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

Satan wants us to get impatient with God, for an impatient Christian is a powerful weapon in the devil's hands. You will recall from our study of James 1 that Moses’ impatience robbed him of a trip to the Holy Land; Abraham’s impatience led to the birth of Ishmael, the enemy of the Jews; and Peter’s impatience almost made him a murderer. When Satan attacks us, it is easy for us to get impatient and run ahead of God and lose God’s blessing as a result. So God has set limit to your suffering.

What is the answer? "My grace is sufficient for thee!" (2 Cor 12:7-9) Paul’s thorn in the flesh was a "messenger of Satan." Paul could have fought it, given up under it, or tried to deny that the thorn existed; but he did not. Instead, he trusted God for the grace he needed; and he turned Satan’s weapon into a tool for the building up of his own spiritual life.

When you find yourself in the furnace of affliction and tribulations, go to the throne of grace and receive from the Lord all the grace you need to endure (Heb 4:14-16). Remind yourself that the Lord has a gracious purpose in all of this suffering, and that He will work out His purposes in His time and for His glory. You are not a robot caught in the jaws of fate. You are a loving child of God, privileged to be a part of a wonderful plan. There is a difference!

Let your Yes be yes and No be No

The exhortation in James 5:12 seems out of place; for what does "speaking oaths" have to do with the problem of suffering? If you have ever suffered, you know the answer: it is easy to say and pledge things you do not mean, and even make bargains with God, when you are going through difficulties. Surely James is reminding us not to make any oath or swear (swearing in this case is not saying F words) it is making an oath for people to believe us and in this instance to appease God to come to our aid; we make promise that we cannot keep. This James warned us not to make stupid oath.

It is a basic principle that true Christian character requires few words. The person who must use many words (including oaths) to convince us has something wrong with his character and must bolster this weakness by using words. If you are a true Christian, with integrity, then all you have to say is yes or no and people will believe you. Jesus warns us that anything more than this is from the evil one.

One of the purposes of suffering is the building of character. Certainly Job was a better man for having gone through the furnace. (James explained this process to us, James 1:2-12.) If words are a test of character, then oaths would indicate that there is yet work to be done. When Peter poured out those oaths in the courtyard (Matt 26:71), he was giving evidence that his character was stiff in need of a transformation.

Conclusion:

James encouraged us to be patient in times of suffering. Like the farmer, we are waiting for a spiritual harvest, for fruit that will glorify God. Like the prophets, we look for opportunities for witness, to share the truth of God. And like Job, we wait for the Lord to fulfil His loving purpose, knowing that He will never cause His children to suffer needlessly. And, Like Job, we shall have a clearer vision of the Lord and come to know Him better for having been in the furnace of affliction.

1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation, trials, tribulations has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."
My friends, I urge you to "Be patient, for the coming of the Lord draws near when He will put an end to all sufferings and tribulations and we will all sing Halelujah."