

Be Patient

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Date: 19 October 2025

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[0 : 00] Okay, here we go with James 5 open in front of us. Here's our question this morning.! What are you meant to do in the face of suffering? When life is hard, when you've been hurt or you're hurting and it's a struggle and you cry and it seems like there's no end to it, what are you meant to do in the face of suffering? We're coming towards the end of the book of James and this letter is written by Jesus's brother, I don't know if you remember this, back in chapter 1 verse 1, to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations. So almost from day one in the early church, the first Jewish Christians were persecuted and they were scattered.

Christian families were forced to leave their homes and make new lives in hostile places. They were oppressed, they were often poor, they were unfairly treated and, says James, they were facing trials of many kinds. Just as people and Christians experience down to this day.

Among us at St John's I would have thought the trials of ill health or injury or disability or being lonely or in a tough relationship. Maybe for some of us at St John's, like the readers of James in those days, maybe a past tragedy, a huge turning point, casting a shadow over all of life.

Maybe you'd say I have a trial of constant pressure or boredom or having little money or enduring what seems like a dead-end job or a dead-end life. What are you meant to do in the face of suffering? When life hurts and you cry and it seems like there's no end to it.

James 5 verses 1 to 6, do you see in the passage, it homes in on some specific harsh suffering. James addresses, verse 1, you rich people, who might be inside the church, maybe more possibly outside the church, rich people, end of verse 3, who have hoarded wealth in the last days, failing to pay the workers who mowed their fields. Which is awful. That is when as a poorer person you work and then you're screwed out of the money owed to you by the rich. When you're sinned against financially by those who hold all the power and there's nothing you can do about it except cry out against them and cry out to the Lord Almighty. Somebody held in poverty by the rich who in verse 6 have even condemned and murdered the innocent. We're not told much more. I don't know exactly what that looked like in the first century. But some of us will have suffered, even maybe are suffering, at the hands of cruel, maybe rich oppressors. Maybe you've experienced that, having money withheld from you, or violence dealt to you, or to someone you love. What are you meant to do in the face of suffering?

[3 : 10] In chapter 5 verses 7 to 11, James stops addressing those rich people and starts speaking again very clearly to his brothers and sisters. Straight good wisdom from God to shape not just his first readers but to us as we face trials of many kinds. When life hurts and you cry and it seems like there is no end to it. What would God have us do? One command here in James 5. Be patient.

First this morning from verses 7 to 9, be patient for the Lord is coming. Let me read verses 7 and 8. 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. You too be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. Three times repeated here in these verses, do you see? Patient, patiently waiting, be patient.

To be patient. To be patient here, at root, it simply means wait. In the face of sufferings and trials and oppression, don't lash out and retaliate.

Don't give up your faith. Don't disappear down into hopeless despair. Rather, patiently wait, patiently wait, says James. So you say, for what? And when we're hurting in our lives and there is no end in sight, wait for what?

[5 : 00] Why should I wait? Rather than lash out or give up? Answer, be patient, wait. Do you see in the text? For the Lord is coming. Look, verse 7. Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.

Verse 8. Be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. This is so important. James is talking about here, the Lord's coming, about something utterly foundational to our understanding of our lives and human history and where our world is going. He's talking about the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. You might be new to Christian things. Did you know this?

That Jesus, who was now, who was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, now sits at the right hand of God the Father as Lord of all. But that's not the end of things. Because a day is coming and is near when Jesus will come in person.

He will be revealed from heaven. He will appear on the final day. He will arrive as the judge of all the earth. And on this final day, which you won't read about online and you won't hear about in the press, on this final day, when he comes in glory to judge both the living and the dead, for that is what is going to happen. On that day, justice will be done and the proud will be brought down and evil oppressors will be dealt with and sufferings and trials will cease and his kingdom will never end. And so, says James, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming. To those in verses 1 to 6, oppressed by the rich and powerful, your cries do reach the ears of the Lord Almighty. And on that day, those who failed to pay wages and have murdered the innocent, they will face justice. So wait. Don't retaliate. Don't lash out. Be patient.

[7 : 17] Be like a farmer. See this, look, verse 7 again. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.

You know, I'm a little bit out of my depth with any planting or gardening or farming kind of ideas, and so I turn to Kate for advice. But as a family, we have watched Clarkson's Farm on Netflix, and so now I'm all over farming techniques. Do you know how it works? You do know how it works. Having cleared the ground and dug it up, with the help from Caleb Cooper, Jeremy Clarkson pulls his massive tractor and a planter behind and he sows the seeds in the ground. I think that's how it works.

And then he just waits. Just got to wait for months for the rain and the growth and the valuable crop. In the first century, the first century Middle Eastern farmer patiently waits for the autumn and the spring rains. And actually in the Old Testament, those rains are a demonstration of the Lord's faithfulness. He will provide the rains. And so you wait for him patiently.

[8 : 42] And James says, verse 8, you too, sufferer, be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near. It is near. He will come.

I mean, you might say now in 2025, really? Is it really near the day when Jesus supposedly comes again?

Because 2,000 years after the writing of James, he hasn't come yet, has he? Which is a real concern. It is the kind of thing that can make a Christian wobble. But the truth is, the coming of the Lord is the next thing on the Lord's agenda.

In line with all God's ancient promises, Jesus has come and lived and died and risen and ascended. And he has poured out his spirit. And for the past 2,000 years, all over the world, the church is growing.

And we live now in what James chapter 5, verse 3, calls the last days. We do live in the last days. And the one thing left for God to complete his plans is the Lord's coming.

[9 : 50] It is near. And so we can now wait. We can wait patiently. And stand firm in our faith.

For he is coming. I want to say this is such good news. It can change how we live now.

See, imagine, thought experiment, step back. Imagine there is no God. Imagine there is no real end. Imagine there is no coming day of justice when the Lord comes.

What would you do? When you are oppressed and suffering. What happens in our society? You either fight back. Or you fall into despair.

We live in a world full of retaliation and revenge. And bring them down and take justice into your own hands. Because no one else is ever going to do it. Or in our society, you descend into dark misery.

[10 : 58] You shut yourself off and do what you can to numb your pain. With scrolling and porn and alcohol and fentanyl.

Because all there is in front of us is we'll live and then we'll suffer and then we'll die. And there's no hope and people won't get what they deserve. It doesn't have to be like that.

It can be different for us. Because we know that the Lord is coming. He will come. Forgive a quote from 300 years ago.

Matthew Henry. Bear your afflictions without murmuring. Bear your injuries without revenge. And though God should not appear for you immediately, wait for him.

Wait for him. Let me apply this in two different directions. Firstly, as a church, you probably know we support Jesus the Holy Lamb Church in northern Pakistan.

[12:04] We prayed for them at our last prayer meeting. In Pakistan, did you know this? Christians are often discriminated against in employment and education. And so they remain poor.

Many Christians in Pakistan who work in low-paid, dangerous, dirty jobs like cleaning sewers. And lack of school opportunities means some can't read. They are kept from that.

You've got to pray for the church there. Oppressed by a Muslim majority. That they will wait patiently for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And secondly, there will be some of us who have suffered badly at the hands of cruel and powerful people. Maybe you've been sinned against financially.

Money that's rightly yours withheld from you by a family member, by an employer. Maybe many years ago. Or there may be some of us who have been sinned against violently.

[13:07] You've been injured. Either you or someone you love. And that hurts you. Maybe even today. If that's you, you should know this.

That your cries reach his ears. And your Lord will come. He will come and deal justly with them. So be patient.

And stand firm in your faith. And at the same time as we together wait, as we wait for the judge to come and deal with them out there.

Verse 9 says, Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you too will be judged. Actually very, very tempting. When you're suffering and under pressure.

To vent your frustration against your family and your friends or your church. And we end up grumbling bitterly against one another. Because somehow here's someone I can take out my pain and frustration on.

[14:16] James says, don't be like that in an oppressive world, Christian believers. Or you too will be judged. For the judge is standing at the door.

The Lord is coming. Be patient. Don't retaliate against them. Don't grumble against one another. But wait patiently in your life.

And stand firm. Be patient for the Lord is coming. In verses 10 and 11 now, two things to say this morning. In verses 10 and 11, James goes on. He adds a second reason.

There's a second angle on patience in the face of suffering. Let's look at this. First thing, be patient for the Lord is coming. Secondly now, be patient for the Lord is compassionate.

Look, brothers and sisters, verse 10. As an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who've persevered.

[15:25] You've heard of Job's perseverance. And have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. My guess is you will know examples of people who've been patient in the face of suffering.

I remember, you don't know her. I remember a dear Christian woman many, many years ago, whose husband was a church pastor. And he upped and left her and their four children to begin a relationship with a man.

And this dear Christian woman, she suffered so, so terribly. Unimaginable, really. And yet, she kept her faith. And 10 years on from the day when he left us, she came up to me on a Sunday morning.

And we'd been speaking about the reality of suffering in a fallen world. And she came up and she had tears in her eyes. And actually, she gave me a hug. And she said, Chris, it will get better.

She was waiting for her Lord to come. James says, as an example, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, Jeremiah and others, who spoke out against evil and lived for God as believers and kept going in their faith while suffering for it.

[16:52] James says, as you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered.

Perseverance, like patience, really. Perseverance is when you bear up under suffering and you keep going.

And the Bible says that is the way to blessing. As it was for Job. If you know anything about Job, the famous Old Testament believer, you will know that he suffered.

Awfully. Intensely, extremely. Over a couple of days of extreme and appalling tragedy, all the blessings of Job were taken from him. His possessions, cruelly stolen or destroyed by fire. His children were killed under a collapsing house. His health was ruined. He found himself covered in festering sores. It's unbelievable to read it.

And Job, stripped of everything, really, he sat on a rubbish heap and scraped himself with a piece of broken pottery. And then he cursed the day of his birth and said, I'd rather be dead.

[18:01] And he groaned, why? Why, Lord? When we preached through the book of Job here at church a couple of years ago, we said, many of us, that though Job's experience was so extreme, we could connect, many of us, with some part of Job's suffering, with some part of his groaning.

But the thing about Job is, it's not just that he suffered, but he persevered as a believer. Kept going. Like, not calmly, not easily, if you know the story, as he suffered, he struggled with God.

He questioned God. Job got to the point of saying, God is like some kind of monster towards me.

And yet, through it all, through all his experience, the flame of faith did not go out in his heart.

Job said, I will wait for him. I will see him. See, Job was a man who suffered. Job was a man who persevered.

And in the end, Job was a man who was blessed. James writes here, we count as blessed those who have persevered. And you have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

[19:28] What did the Lord finally bring about in his life? Well, Job the man ended up with a deeper and more humble faith in the Lord.

And more than that, the Lord restored Job at the end and blessed him once more. And the point is, as it was for Job, so it will be for all of us who walk in the footsteps of Job.

Back in chapter 1 and verse 12, James writes, blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Do you know that verse? I suspect I know in part for some of us, but I do not know exactly for all of us, I'm sure, the kind of trials that you are going through in your life right now.

Said at the beginning, for sure among us there is ill health and injury, disability, there is loneliness, being in a tough relationship, disappointment, money struggles, pressure, stress, what feels like a dead-end job or past tragedy.

[20:50] I don't know what you are going through actually now. And actually you don't know what sufferings you will bear in the future. But James is saying here that to those who patiently persevere, we will, on the day when the Lord comes in glory to judge the living and the dead, we will receive the crown of life.

That is, your trials will end and your sufferings will cease and gladness and joy will overtake you in the Bible's language and sorrow and sighing will flee away and our God will wipe every tear from our eyes and he will make all things well forever.

You say, why? Why would he do that? Last sentence of verse 11, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Compassion, the word, means it's when you're moved in your guts with tender concern for someone in distress and it says here the Lord is full of compassion.

It's a word that James has invented. He's full of compassion. That is, the God who reigns in heaven and sees you today, he's not nasty and nor is he unfeeling and he cares for those who suffer.

[22:18] more than anyone else, he sees and knows what we go through and more than anyone else, he has tender concern for you and loves you mercifully.

Do you know that about him? Well then, be patient now. Be patient. for he is coming and he is compassionate and he will finally restore you and bless you for all eternity.

And we asked at the beginning, what are you meant to do in the face of suffering? There are other New Testament passages on suffering, other angles, but what are you meant to do when life is hard and you've been hurt or are hurting and it's a struggle and you cry and it seems like there's no end. What will you do? Honestly, if I didn't know God, me, I don't think I'd be able to cope.

I'm knowing evil in the world. I'm experiencing some personal and family trials. Seeing some suffering amongst those whom I love.

[23:36] and then just imagining that we'll walk forward and suffer and die with no justice and no hope, I'd be able to cope with that. But this isn't make-believe.

Wonderfully, the Lord Jesus did come in history a first time and he suffered for my and our sins to bring us to God and this same Lord Jesus Christ will come again in history a second time. He is standing at the door. He is near. He will judge. He is faithful. He is full of compassion and mercy.

Don't say this every week or much, but if you're not yet a Christian and you're here this morning, could today be the day that you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who is full of compassion? you come to him, humble yourself before him, cast him on your mercy, Lord Jesus, I take you as my Lord. That's what it is to become a Christian.

[24 : 45] And when you become a Christian or if you are a Christian believer this morning as many of us are, could you then take these few precious words of wisdom to heart in your life now and going forward?

James chapter 5, in the face of suffering, oppression that comes to us, suffering here, don't retaliate against others. Don't grumble against one another and don't give up your faith and don't despair. Instead, like the farmer, like the prophets, like Job, be patient. Together as a church we'll be patient, we'll wait, we'll stand firm and we'll keep going because we know that the Lord is coming and we have a Lord who is full of compassion and mercy.

Let me lead us in a prayer together and then we're going to sing. Amen. Gracious Father, you see us, you know us, not just the evil we do but the evils we have endured, both the sufferings we inflict and also the sufferings we bear, the trials which maybe are secret to us yet you know.

We praise and thank you that you are not a God who is distant nor a God who is nasty. Thank you that your Son, the Lord Jesus, will come in glory to judge the living and the dead and that his kingdom will have no end.

[26 : 46] Thank you that this Lord Jesus is full of compassion and mercy towards us. please make us those, we pray, who live our lives patiently as we wait for his coming.

We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.