

Patiently Enduring
James 5:10-11
ABC 9/1/19

The late Dr Albert Schweitzer, famous medical missionary, was once asked what the best way to raise children is. He replied, *There are only 3 ways to teach a child. The 1st is by example, the 2nd is by example, the 3rd is by example.*¹ What he said about child rearing is also true about growing as a believer. We all need examples to follow, especially when we face tough times. If the aim of the Christian life is to glorify God & enjoy Him forever,² then we especially need to glorify & enjoy Him when we encounter trials. That's why James writes to us. He wants to help us cultivate patience & perseverance during difficult times & to have long-suffering endurance in suffering. John Piper teaches that *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*. But when serious trials hit, we're prone to doubt God's love, goodness, grace, & mercy toward us. When we see the ungodly prospering & we're suffering, we're tempted to say, like the psalmist, **Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure** (Ps 73:13a). But after he gets his proper bearings, he rightly concludes, **Whom have I in heaven but You? & besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh & my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart & my portion forever** (73:25-26). Jonathan Edwards has a sermon on Ps 73 titled, *God the Best Portion of the Christian*. He says, *how great is the happiness of those who have chosen the Fountain of all good, who prefer Him before all things in heaven or on earth, & who can never be deprived of Him to all eternity.*³ When a believer endures trials & tribulations with that attitude, God is glorified. In Piper's book, *The Roots of Endurance*, he highlights perseverance in the lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, & William Wilberforce. He says, *The aim of all our endurance is that Christ be seen & savored in the world as our glorious God.*⁴ The theme of patiently enduring trials runs throughout the Bible. The author of Hebrews says, **For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised** (10:36). He tells us to hold fast our confession of faith (3:6, 14; 10:23) & wants us to be **imitators of those who through faith & patience inherit the promises** (6:12). Of Abraham,

¹ Quoted by Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, & Eternity*, questions for chapter 20

² Westminster Catechism, question 1

³ Preached April, 1736, www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/bestportion.htm

⁴ p 28

he stated, **having patiently waited, he inherited the promise** (6:15). Heb 11 is filled with examples of those who by faith endured hardship & suffering. This is James' theme for us this morning. His readers were suffering while the ungodly rich were prospering at their expense. James builds on his earlier theme, **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him** (1:12). In our text, he tells us when we experience tough times, look to the prophets & to Job as examples of patient endurance. **7-12** PRAY

James doesn't just command us **be patient** (7-8), he tells how. Aren't you glad God's Word doesn't just give us commands? It also gives us examples for our help & hope. We have real-life stories of how real people with real weaknesses were able to endure real trials & suffering as God made His mercy more real to them. This is the same mercy He has for us.

1. Consider the Prophets James 1st points us to the OT prophets. **10**

The prophets were maligned, attacked, vilified, criticized, ostracized, & killed. How well do you know the prophets? If you're like me, probably not well.

A. Read the OT I'm still amazed at how many Christians don't read the OT. In Rom 15:4, Paul says, **whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance & the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.** He repeats the same theme with reference to Israel in the wilderness, **these things happened to them as an example, & they were written for our instruction** (1 Cor 10:10). This means that knowing OT history, is important for our growth in godliness. Jesus assumed we know biblical history when He said, **Blessed are you when people insult you & persecute you, & falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice & be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you** (Mt 5:11-12). If you aren't familiar with the history of the prophets, you won't do well when you suffer & go through trials. Any prophet worth his salt suffered & was persecuted. James tells us to **take the prophets as an example of *endurance* in suffering.** What prophets? He doesn't specify but it would include people like...

Isaiah, which tradition says he was martyred by being sawn in two (Heb 11:37). His God-given task? Preach even though the people won't listen (Is 6:9-12).

Jeremiah, was told by God to preach with the promise that he'd be hated, maligned, persecuted, & ignored (Jer 1:5-19). He was known as the weeping prophet. He was thrown in a miry, empty cistern, but faithfully & uncomplainingly kept preaching.

Ezekiel who suffered greatly but endured faithfully.

Daniel was a faithful man deported into captivity. His faithfulness to God landed him with some lions.

Hosea endured faithfully with an unfaithful wife. He was a living object lesson of God's love.

Joel, Amos, & all the minor prophets endured the faithlessness of Israel & faithfully prophesied God's judgment at great personal cost.

Stephen preached in Acts 7:52, **which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?** American Christianity has it backwards. We think blessedness means happiness. James tells us, *consider the prophets*. Why? Because they were counted blessed for their endurance & the fact they spoke **in the name of the Lord**. They were blessed not because they had no opposition but because they kept going through it & persevered in steadfast faith. God considers them successful because of their faithfulness. I can't imagine preaching all your life, as Jeremiah did, with only negative responses. It's hard enough to take the occasional negative comment or to see people walk away from your ministry from time-to-time. When that happens, you tend to question yourself. But if you only had negative responses, year in & year out, it would be tough to keep going. But Jeremiah kept faithfully proclaiming God's truth. He also suffered physical persecution. He was beaten, put in stocks, imprisoned, & thrown into a muddy well. He battled false prophets who told the people what they wanted to hear, which was opposite of Jeremiah's message which they needed to hear. To the very end, Jeremiah's audience rejected his message, calling him a liar (Jer 42-43). Yet in spite of all of these setbacks, as he saw Jerusalem in smoldering ruins, Jeremiah could write these amazing words, **The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I have hope in Him'** (Lam 3:22-24). Like the psalmist, Jeremiah knew that if God is your portion, you have it all, even though you have nothing else. Read the OT & learn patient endurance from the prophets. Although James doesn't directly say this, I believe he'd tell us...

B. Read Church History Knowing the history of the church & the lives of the godly men & women throughout church history helps us in our own life. Reading Christian biographies helps us put our times & circumstances in perspective. It reminds us of the price others have paid to hand the baton of the gospel to us & that we must hand it off faithfully to the next generation. Like the OT prophets, Christian biographies give us examples to follow. When we see how faithful people in the past stood firm in the midst of controversy or persecution, how they held firmly to God's Word when under fire, it encourages us to do the same. Reading biographies of godly Christians gives us an understanding of others & ourselves. We learn that even great men of God had their shortcomings & faults & yet God used them. This helps us realize God can & will use us in spite of our imperfections. By reading of some of the mistakes others made, hopefully we can avoid the same. By seeing how they trusted God against overwhelming trials, we're encouraged to follow their examples. So read the godly examples of the prophets & read Christian biographies.

(Wilberforce, Mary Slessor, Swans are Not Silent)

Somehow, we've gotten the idea that if we follow & serve God, He'll protect us from difficulties. Not true. Read the prophets! They were persecuted because they **spoke in the name of the Lord**. Jeremiah lamented that when he spoke God's words, it resulted in his being mocked & hated. Then he added, **But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; & I am weary of holding it in, & I cannot endure it** (Jer 20:9). So he spoke & suffered for it. John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, spent 12 years in jail because he preached without the required license from the religious authorities. If he'd promised to stop preaching, they'd have let him out of jail. He had a wife & children, including a blind daughter. He said when they would leave after visiting him, it was like tearing his flesh from his bones to see them go. But, he refused to promise to stop preaching in order to secure his release. That should encourage us to endure the trials we face. When you suffer in serving the Lord, follow the example of the prophets who patiently endured.

2. Consider Job If there's any single biblical story that demolishes the false prosperity gospel, Job's story is it. In chpts 1-2 Job has all his wealth, health, & prosperity, taken from him. Not because of

his faithlessness, but because he was the most faithful man on earth. Vs 11 should read, ***Behold***, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job & have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings. For some reason, the updated NASB leaves out the word **behold**, which calls attention to what follows. It's a prompter of attention, which serve to emphasize the following statement. It means look, listen, pay attention to Job & his story.⁵ The opening scene in Job presents a man who prospered in every way. He **was blameless & upright; he feared God & shunned evil** (Job 1:1). To be **blameless** didn't imply perfection but that he was a man of integrity. Job was also very rich & had a large family. The next scene takes place in Heaven.

God said to Satan, "From where do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD & said, "From roaming about on the earth & walking around on it." The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless & upright man, fearing God & turning away from evil" (1:7-8).

Satan knew of Job & responded with a sneer.

Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him & his house & all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, & his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now & touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face (1:9-11).

Satan is saying no one serves God for who He is but only for what he can get from Him. So God allowed Satan to take everything, except Job himself (1:12). With that, 4 devastating disasters fell on Job. A messenger arrived & told him the Sabeans had taken all his oxen & donkeys & killed his servants (15). Before he finished, a 2nd messenger told him fire from heaven had consumed all his sheep & servants (16). Then came another messenger with news the Chaldeans had taken all his camels & executed his servants (17). While he was still reeling from these, a 4th messenger came with a report of an even deeper tragedy: all Job's children were dead, having been killed when the house fell on them (18-19). Obviously, this was a trying day for Job. But amazingly Job didn't do what Satan said he'd do. He didn't curse & renounce God but **arose & tore his robe & shaved his head, & he fell to the ground & worshiped. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, & naked I shall return there. The LORD gave & the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD"** (1:20-21). He proved he didn't serve God for what God gave him. At another meeting in heaven,

⁵ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition, Vol 1, p 811

when God pointed to Job's integrity, Satan snarled, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Your hand now, & touch his bone & his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life" (2:4-6). Satan afflicted Job with running sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Job went to the garbage heap, found a broken piece of pottery, & began to scrape his festering sores. Then his grief-stricken wife came & said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God & die!" But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God & not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (2:9-10). Would we do half as well? Next came Job's friends, who began by keeping their mouths shut in an eloquent silence of compassion. But then they spoke, 3x each. At 1st they were gentle with him, but when it became apparent he didn't agree that his calamity came because he was a great sinner, they became brutal. Finally, a long-silent observer, Elihu, rebuked Job for his self-righteousness & urged him to repent. The stage was set for God to answer Job from the whirlwind. But before we get thee, in the exchange between Job & his friends, Job says things which don't fit the phrase, *the patience of Job*. Maybe it should be the *perseverance of Job* instead, which has the idea of endurance.⁶ But even with this understanding, some still think Job's conduct falls short. It's true that Job resorts to passionate outbursts, as when he cursed the day of his birth (3:1, 11-19) & when he berated his friends, saying, **Sorry comforters are you all. Is there no limit to windy words? Or what plagues you that you answer?** (16:2-3). It's also true he protested to God,

&, Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or the sea monster, that You set a guard over me? (7:11-12; cf 10:18; 23:2).

'I cry out to You for help, but You do not answer me, I stand up & You turn Your attention against me. You have become cruel to me. With the might of Your hand You persecute me. You lift me up to the wind & cause me to ride; & You dissolve me in a storm. For I know that You will bring me to death & to the house of meeting for all living. (30:20-23).

But though Job cried & complained, he refused to renounce God. Rather he said,

I know that my Redeemer lives, & at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, & whom my eyes will see & not another. My heart faints within me! (19:25-27).

⁶ Ralph Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary, James*, p 175

Job refused to surrender his integrity as his wife urged him to do. He was still blameless & upright. He never ceased believing in God. William Barclay says,

The great fact about Job is that in spite of all his torrent of questionings, & in spite of the agonizing questionings which tore at his heart, he never lost his faith in God... The very greatness of Job lies in the fact that in spite of everything which tore at his heart, he never lost his grip on faith & his grip on God. Job's faith is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled & questioned & sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart.⁷

How did God respond? He showed Job a number of natural marvels which Job couldn't explain (chpts 38-41). Then God said in effect, *If you can't understand the physical world which you see, how can you understand ME you can't see?* But in all this Job persevered in his suffering & faith. What an encouragement to know that God doesn't expect stoic perseverance in the midst of trials. He understands tears. He accepts our questions. But He does demand we recognize our finiteness & acknowledge there are things at work beyond our comprehension. A plan far bigger than us is moving toward completion. God demands that we, like Job, hold on to our faith & hope in God in times of trouble. Job had come to the end of his words. But the end for Job was very different than some might expect. God blessed Job with many blessings. His primary blessings were spiritual, including humility.

Then Job answered the LORD & said, "I know that You can do all things, & that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." 'Hear, now, & I will speak; I will ask You, & You instruct me.' "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You; Therefore I retract, & I repent in dust & ashes" (42:1-6).

Job bowed before God in deep humility because he saw God's greatness & his own finiteness. Job saw his presumptuous speech for what it was & repented. Along with his humility, Job received spiritual insight. His words in vs 5 describe this: **I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You.** Have you seen God in this way? Annie Dillard has written, *You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is required.*⁸ Many Christian graces are but faint shadows until times of trial where they shine brightly. Keep in mind, though, Job was still on a garbage heap. He was still covered with leaking lesions.

⁷ *The Letters of James & Peter*, pp 147-148

⁸ Quoted by Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, p 17

Flies still fed on him. His wife still loathed him (cf 19:17). All his possessions were gone & his children were dead. But he had been infinitely blessed, for Job saw God as he'd never seen Him before. That was **the outcome of the Lord's dealings** with him. Job's secondary blessings were material. Some focus too much on this. Sure, Job had more than before, & he had another 3 daughters & 7 more sons, but he never forgot the loss of the 1st children. Only in Heaven will everything be perfect, where we will receive **an inheritance which is imperishable & undefiled & will not fade away** (1 Pt 1:4). Briefly, here are 4 lessons for us today:

A. God Blesses Perseverance The Bible puts a huge emphasis on the need for endurance through trials. Paul assured the Colossians that although they were formerly God's enemies, now they were reconciled to Him. Then he added, **if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established & steadfast, & not moved away from the hope of the gospel** (Col 1:23). The author of Hebrews writes, **For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end** (3:14). There are many other such texts. You may wonder why we would count those blessed who endure, if all they experienced was suffering, persecution, & a martyr's death? As we saw last week, the biblical answer is because they are enjoying eternal rewards in heaven that are beyond human description! If God's promises for heavenly reward aren't true, then we'd be fools to suffer for Christ (1 Cor 15:19).

B. Perseverance isn't Perfection As we've seen, Job wasn't always patient in his trials but he did endure. God graciously brought him through & rewarded him in the end in spite of his struggles & shortcomings. If Job had handled it all perfectly, none of us could relate to him. His very human struggles encourage us to submit to God's dealings & to trust Him, even when our emotions are all over the place.

C. Knowing God is Sovereign Helps Us Endure James refers to **the Lord's dealings** with Job. Although it was Satan who worked behind the scenes to take Job's property & to kill his children, Job affirmed that it was God behind it all: **the Lord has taken away** (Job 1:21); **Shall we accept good from God & not accept adversity?** (Job 2:10). 1 Pt 4:19 says, **Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.** John Bunyan,

commenting on this, said, *God has appointed who shall suffer. Suffering comes not by chance or by the will of man, but by the will & appointment of God.*⁹ If you deny or ignore this truth, you destroy the foundation for endurance in trials.

D. The Outcome or End of God's Dealings James says, **you ... have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings.** We can read the end of the story & see God had a purpose in Job's sufferings. If Job had never suffered, his example to countless generations, including ours, wouldn't exist. But because of what Job went through, millions have gained strength in their sufferings. God has a purpose & a plan in all our trials. We must take Him at His Word & know He's conforming us to the image of His Son just as He's promised to do in Rom 8:28. **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.** If we don't submit our will to what God says & patiently endure trials outside our control, if our focus is getting out at all costs & we refuse to have joy in God, we're disobeying God's command in James & are short-circuiting God's work in us for our growth.

3. Consider God James ends vs 11 with the words, **The Lord is full of compassion & mercy.** We mustn't allow ourselves to be persuaded to think ill of God. He has a father's heart even when He allows darkness to come. He cannot be unkind to His children. He tells us, **Can a woman forget her nursing child & have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands** (Is 49:15, 16). James coined a new word to say the Lord is **full of compassion**.¹⁰ Other ways of saying this are He is very, very compassionate or full of tender compassion. To this **compassion** James adds **mercy**. God is **full of compassion** as He cares for us in our misery & He's **merciful** as He forgives our sins through the death & resurrection of His Son. All of which says to those who are undergoing hardships: God is good. Charles Spurgeon, who suffered greatly, begins a sermon on this vs by saying, *We are far too apt to entertain hard thoughts of God.*¹¹ Do you have hard thoughts of God? It's easy to do in times of trouble. James says, **the Lord is full of compassion & is merciful.** If that's the lesson from

⁹ Cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, p 30

¹⁰ Peter Davids, *James*, p 188

¹¹ *The Pitifulness of the Lord & the Comfort of the Afflicted*, www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-pitifulness-of-the-lord-the-comfort-of-the-afflicted/

Job's sufferings, then it certainly applies to our lesser sufferings. Against our feelings & against the temptations to complain & quit, we must affirm by faith, as the psalmist did, **You are good & do good.** & **It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes** (Ps 119:68, 71). Stephen Charnock, who spends 150 pages expounding on God's goodness in his classic *The Existence & Attributes of God*, says, *He can no more act contrary to this goodness in any of His actions, than He can un-God Himself.*¹² One of Satan's earliest tricks was to get Adam & Eve to doubt God's goodness toward them (Gen 3:1, 5). He still uses that same bait when we go through trials. One reason we fall prey to doubting God's goodness is we think too highly of ourselves & too lowly of God. We mistakenly think God owes us something good because we deserve it. But even Job, whom God described as the most godly man on earth, didn't suffer unjustly in all he went through. As Charnock wrote, *God owes nothing to the holiest creature; what He gives is a present from His bounty, not the reward of the creature's merit.*¹³ Or, as Paul asks rhetorically, **Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?** (Rom 11:35). God doesn't owe us anything but judgment. Any blessings we enjoy are from His grace!

How will we survive when difficult times come? It all depends on our view of God. Is your God full of tenderness & overflowing with mercy? If so, you may be knocked down by circumstances, but you won't stay down forever because the Lord will pick you up. Read the OT & contemplate the lives of the prophets & Job. Read the biographies of the faithful saints in church history. Look to them as examples of patient endurance; that it can be done. Follow their lead & trust in your compassionate & merciful Lord. May God make us strong & give us grace to endure. The issue is our God. If He is who He says He is, then we've got every reason to keep believing & enduring when hard times hit. PRAY May our faith grow as we wait patiently on the Lord. The issue isn't our problems. PRAY COMMUNION

There's only one person in the Bible who suffered more than Job & that's Jesus. That's why Job points us to Jesus. Everything James is talking about is fulfilled by Jesus. & that starts at the

¹² 2:224

¹³ 2:212

beginning of His ministry, not just the end. As you read the gospels, have you noticed Jesus is never in a hurry? He never seems rushed. He never seems flustered. He never seems stressed. Did anybody ever have a more demanding schedule than the Son of God? No! & yet His patience as He walks the road set before Him is amazing. & don't forget He knew where it all was headed. Every morning He got up & set out about His day's work that His Father had given Him knowing He was one step closer to Calvary. He knew the ultimate test of His patience would be when He had to fulfill that prophecy He knew by heart. *As a lamb is silent before slaughter* (Is 53:7; Acts 8:32). He knew that day was coming. & when it got there, isn't it amazing to read about His patient endurance? Pilate, a merely mortal Roman puppet saying, *Don't you realize I have the power over you?* Think of the patience of Jesus in the midst of that. The patient endurance of Jesus as He was whipped & flogged & made to carry His cross & hang there & die. Aren't you thankful He's still patient, only this time with us? He hasn't dealt with us according to our sins. When you sin again & you confess, *God, I'm sorry, that will never happen again!* & then it happens again & again & again. We begin to think, *There's no more mercy for me!* That's when we must run back to the cross of our patient, compassionate, merciful Savior & know we'll never exhaust His patient love. Jesus isn't an impetuous, petulant, easily-angered, crabby God. He's not capricious nor mean. He's not vengeful against His children. He's a God of glorious mercy & compassion. He doesn't get overwhelmed with our sin & our failure when we do it again & again. He doesn't fold His arms & says, *Will you please just get it right?* He never does that. We do that but He never does. Because we know the purpose of the Lord is to mold us, to shape us, to make us more like Him & knowing He's patient with us in that process enables us to endure suffering patiently, following His example.

PRAY PASS

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom" (Mt 26:26-29, NLT).