

## **Faith Vindicated through Patience and Prayer** **James 5**

### **Introduction**

James has proclaimed what active and fruitful faith looks like. He finishes his letter with a warning for rich people. He encourages believers to be patient and to place a high value on prayer. Lastly, he encourages believers to watch out for each other, so that none wander from the truth.

### **Outline of James 5**

- I. Rebuke and Retribution of the Calloused Rich - James 5:1-6
- II. Reward of Patience - James 5:7-12
- III. Rejoicing and the Power of Prayer - James 5:13-18
- IV. Rescue the Wandering - James 5:19-20

### **I. Rebuke and Retribution of the Calloused Rich - James 5:1-6**

The Lord Jesus Christ ministered to the rich and poor without partiality. Speaking of riches, Jesus said, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-20).”* James reminds believers where their treasure is to be.

For example, clothing is a sign of riches. Over time, even the most beautiful clothing will wear out, go out of style, or be outgrown. If your happiness is tied to your clothing (riches), it won't last long. Fashions change faster than seasons pass, and cloth is a weak material.

Likewise, gold and silver tarnish. James is speaking of how money loses its value. Just as the 'confederate' money became instantly useless after the Civil War ended. Those who trust in their money often find it useless. Even if the money somehow kept its value, there is

so much that money cannot buy, such as love, respect, loyalty, salvation, and eternal life.

James also had much to say about rich people that make life harder for poor people. God declares it fraud (dishonest trick) to hold back money earned and owed to another man. Moses instructed the Israelites to pay their workers daily. An employer takes on a moral responsibility to be just to his employees.

*The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. Lord of Sabaoth* is a particular title for God, meaning “Lord of Hosts.” It implies that God's heavenly armies are greater than earthly armies. Sometimes, it can feel as though evil is winning. But, one day, every head will bow and justice will be given by the one true Judge (Romans 14:11, 12). Are you mistreating anyone, such as a sibling, parent, friend, or neighbor? How will you change your behavior to glorify God?

### **II. Reward of Patience - James 5:7-12**

Do you ever get the idea that patience is a quiet and easy action. After all, most people don't break out in a sweat when they exercise patience. However, patience is more work than you may think. It exercises two graces that God gives us: trust and expectancy.

Because people will oppress, injustice will continue, and evil will seem to triumph. Believers need to refrain from complaining and rebellion. Instead, we should encourage each other to trust God.

Farmers are a classic example of patience. Patience means waiting for the right time. Times and seasons are in God's providence. Who can hurry the seasons? We cannot make the sun rise earlier or later. Flowers bloom in their appointed time. The growth of grain

cannot be hurried. The farmer learns to control his anxiety. He waits. He learns that patience prevents frustration, wasted energies, and useless activity. Waiting is difficult because it seems easier to do something. That is why patience needs self-control. Both are fruits of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:22).

James says that Old Testament prophets are another example of patience. They spoke in the *name of the Lord* and waited for results from their preaching. God's prophets (such as Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, and Daniel) were patient, even until death! In fact, they looked beyond death to events far ahead of them. They endured persecution, rejection, and even death without losing their reward. They did not fight back when they were mistreated. Are you suffering for obeying God? Are you tempted to strike back or quit? Will you choose to stay and wait for God's action?

The third example James gives of patience involves perseverance. Job was a righteous man whose 7 sons, 3 daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 donkeys were killed or stolen...all on the same day! To make matters worse, Job was struck with boils from head to toe. Job persevered through these devastating trials, and ultimately, God restored all *Job's losses* and gave him *twice as much as he had before* (Job 42:10)! The story of Job is a great comfort to Christians. He is a wonderful example of perseverance which leads to patience.

When Christians faithfully endure hard times with patience, God is glorified. Those watching the Christian will often sense God's character (His kindness, compassion, strength, etc.). They may want to know more about the Lord and could be drawn to study God's word. When this happens, the righteous suffering results in new fruits. In other words, the trial will have brought others to do good works, such as praying, reading Scripture, and repenting. In this way, God is glorified by faithful endurance through suffering.

James warns Christians to *not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath*. Too often, our patience wears thin, meaning there is just not enough of it. But, just as Job refused to curse God in his suffering, we also must not curse God nor complain against Him. We must also guard ourselves from talking badly about other people (5:9). James is repeating hear what Jesus said in Matthew 5:34-37, *Do not swear at all, neither by heaven...nor by earth...but let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No.'*

### III. Rejoicing and the Power of Prayer - James 5:13-20

What is the correct response to trials? James writes, *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray!* When sorrow or trouble comes, the Christian's first response should be to pray. Take the burden to Him immediately and leave it there (Psalm 55:22).

Are you happy because things are going well? Did you get exactly what you wanted for your birthday? Did your grandma send you something special in the mail? Sing your praise to God. *Sing psalms*, James says. The Book of Psalms is there to give assistance in proclaiming praise to God. The Jews have always used the Psalms in this way. Did you know that Jesus sang with His disciples on His last night with them before facing the crucifixion (Matthew 26:30)? Why not pause right now and sing praise to God using His own words, a psalm such as *The Lord is My Shepherd* (Psalm 23)? Think of how many song lyrics you know...how many of them are the words of Scripture? Perhaps you could take the time to memorize some Scripture to song and praise God with it.

James asks the question *Is anyone among you sick?* Some believe the words:

*Let him call for the elders of the church,  
and let them pray over him, anointing  
him with oil in the name of the Lord*

are a formula for healing. Is James giving special instructions to receive healing? The answer is no. It is unlikely that James is

giving steps to healing. Verses 13-18 all speak about prayer and appropriate times for prayer. The elders being called indicates the need for confession and the anointing with oil symbolizes consecration (Exodus 40:13 and 1 Samuel 16:13). Most sick people recover without elders being called or being anointed with oil. Others die who have used these measures. Perhaps, the best way to interpret these verses is to acknowledge confession and consecration need to be a part of our prayers. Confession would be our desire to repent of our sins, and consecration would be our desire to be set apart for God.

James says the *effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much* (5:16b). Half-hearted prayers are usually ineffective. But in the light of God's mercy, half-hearted prayers are better than none.

Elijah is given as an example of someone *with a nature like ours*. In other words, he was an ordinary human being. But, he prayed and the results were extraordinary. He affected nature with his prayers.

Over time, as a Christian grows in his understanding of his faith, the importance of prayer should become clearer. Prayer takes effort, time, and thought. Jesus certainly gave it much more effort, time, and thought than most Christians do today. If He felt the need for such a prayer life, how much more do we need it (Matthew 6:5-15, 26:36-46)?

#### **IV. Rescue the Wandering - James 5:19-20**

So far, James has talked about how faith works in a person's own life: their words, works, trials, and reactions. Now, he shares the best fruit that can come from faith which is helping someone else find faith! Jesus said *go therefore and make disciples of all nations* (Matthew 28:19). That is the potential Christians have!

Rejecting Jesus Christ is the greatest mistake in life. There is no greater error. James describes these unbelievers as *anyone among*

*you*. Do you think of unbelievers as someone among you or as "someone out there," across an ocean, homeless in an alley, or living in 'bad' neighborhoods. The truth is that unbelievers are nearby: relatives, friends, neighbors, and classmates. Until we have shared our faith with those closest to us, how can we expect God and the Gospel to work in other places? We do not need to reach very far to touch someone who needs Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Unbelievers carry around a burden, like an invisible backpack, full of sin. They don't realize how heavy that burden is because they don't know anything different. The difficulties they feel are a result of their sin. So, they come up with lots of ways to get through their hardships: superstitions, drugs, cults, astrology, and drinking are just a few.

When a person receives Christ, the burden of sin is released, and for the first time ever, they experience true freedom. Believers continue to receive forgiveness as a result of this freedom for the rest of their lives. Have you experienced this freedom? Have you passed from death to life (John 5:24)? Have you experienced victory over the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). If so, take a moment now to thank Jesus for saving you from error, sin, and death.

The crowning act of faith is to participate in bringing another person to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This fruitfulness is the result of victorious faith which has found the meaning of life. When you share your victorious faith with someone, you send a person on the right path to do the same. This is valid faith in Christ and the fruit is eternal! †