

Established Hearts

James 5:7-12

While we cannot see the immediate future, we know all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). The trials James' readers face, if endured patiently by faith, will go like seeds in the ground to produce a great harvest. To understand your problems this way requires a heart established in grace.

Summary of the Text

James returns to directly addressing the church, calling the "brethren" to be patient until the coming of the Lord (v. 1). He just condemned the rich oppressors who heaped up wealth in the last days, warning that judgment is coming (5:1-6). That judgment arrived in AD 70, the days of vengeance Jesus said were less than a generation away (Lk. 21:22, 32). When you are persecuted and suffering, it feels like it will never end and the temptation is to act like it won't. Look at the farmer, James says, who waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting for the early and latter rain (v. 7). These rains produced the harvest and God blessed them in His covenant faithfulness: "And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil" (Deut. 11:13-14). Like the farmer, they must be patient and establish their hearts because the coming of the Lord is at hand (v. 8; cf. Matt. 26:45). The brethren must not groan against one another, lest they be judged; behold, the judge stands at the door (v. 9). He says to consider the prophets who spoke "Thus says the Lord" as an example of suffering and patience (v. 10). We consider them blessed who endure. Job is the premier example. Through no fault of his own, he lost everything, and even though he eventually fell into sin, the Lord's compassion and mercy blessed him beyond (v. 11). More than anything, James concludes, do not swear by heaven or earth or anything else. Let your "yes" be "yes," and your "no," "no," so that you don't fall under judgement (v. 12).

The Coming Harvest

Walking by faith means trusting God in the present, knowing He has been faithful in the past, and looking to Him to continue to fulfill His promises in the future. These persecuted want immediate relief, and though it will come, James uses the word "patience" four times to emphasize the need to wait (vv. 7-8, 10). In order to follow through on the call to be patient, you first have to trust the one giving it; second, you must believe that the thing you wait for is not too far off; and third, you have to count the cost and take action be faithful in the meantime. *Therefore*, James says, be patient until the coming of the Lord (v. 7). The *Therefore* refers to the approaching judgment of their wealthy oppressors who have kept back wages and heaped up resources for themselves in those last days (5:1-6). Peter makes a similar argument about the scoffers would come in the last days, whom the apostles and Jesus spoke about, who would mock the idea of coming judgment just as they did in Noah's time before the flood (2 Pet. 3:2-7). Just as the flood came, so would the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of the powerful in Israel who were persecuting the church. The word of God has real, life-changing, decision-making impact on His people. Jesus said that the time was coming when they would see armies surrounding Jerusalem, and to get out: "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her" (Lk. 21:20). James' and Jesus' words were reliable. Though James' audience did not know exactly when relief from persecution would come, it wasn't too far out. This whole epistle equips them to bide the time fruitfully: become mature and wise (1:2-7); understand temptation and sin (1:12-16); do the word (1:21-27); don't favor the rich (2:1-13); faith without works is dead (2:14-26); know and harness the power of the tongue (3:1-12); mortify envy and violence (3:13-4:6); repent thoroughly (4:7-10); don't condemn your brother (4:11-12); don't

Established Hearts

James 5:7-12

be presumptuous about the future (4:13-17); wait for God to deal with your persecutors (5:1-12). This is how you establish your heart (v. 8). You know what God has said and that there will be many distractions, opportunities, and reasons to disobey and fail to exercise the patience He requires. After planting, the farmer has no evidence the crop will come up but has to wait patiently (v. 7). Soon-to-be-unemployed farmers conclude there's nothing they can do. Why plant if only God can give the increase? Because He only grants the increase to those who plant. Dealing with the increase requires preparation and work to harvest and those who sleep, slumber, and fold their hands get mugged by poverty (Prov. 24:33). But God blesses the diligent, and the gift of faith is to see your problems, even persecution, as seeds that will bear fruit 30, 60, and 100-fold in due time. We do this knowing we can't make it rain and drought is a real possibility. But in God's economy, the more unbearable it seems, the greater good He will bring from it.

Patient Prophets

When things keep getting worse and suffering draws out, people turn on one another. If you don't like what is happening—less money, more stress, difficult kids, conflict at work—it's easy to draw a line from the problem to that sinner nearby: "If you hadn't done this, we would not be here, or at least it wouldn't be so bad." See the Judge at the door, the one who has mercy on your sins just like theirs (v. 9; cf. Mk. 4:24). James says to consider the prophets, chosen to speak on behalf of God, whom we consider blessed to suffer for God and endure (vv. 10-11). We also remember they don't hover above the ground, immune to temptation and sin. Even after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Elijah thinks all hope is lost: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kgs. 18:14). The Lord had more info: "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kgs. 18:18). The prophets patiently suffer, but not perfectly, and still the Lord delivers. Job suffers *because* he is faithful: "Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'" (Job 1:8). He lost his ten children and all of his possessions, concluding he came out naked and will return to the ground with nothing, but blessed be the name of the Lord. Forty chapters later the Lord restores him, rebukes his awful friends, and gives him ten more children and twice the possessions. This what James means that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful (v. 11).

Rash Oaths

Remember swearing is about taking oaths. When things are out of our control, we tend to say, "I'm never going to do this or that." Peter insists he would never deny the Lord, and if anyone ever looked to have the courage to follow through, it would be him. And yet three times before the sun goes down he does, even after Jesus warns him. You don't establish your heart in order to make bold predictions and commitments about the future. These reveal pride, and humble know the deceitful nature of their hearts (Jer. 17:9). Instead, do what you say you'll do, and plant your problems as seeds in the ground for God to grow into a great harvest. Establish your heart to endure the trials before you knowing that Jesus has already secured your victory; we are more conquerors through Him who loved us. He is doing great things in and among so trust Him to continue.