James Lesson 7 (2022)

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE PERSEVERED**

James 5:1-20

Key Verse: 5:11

“As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

During the last two months, we’ve been studying the book of James. Pastor James presented essential instructions on becoming mature believers in Christ Jesus throughout the book. Now we have reached the end of our study. Pastor James concludes his letter by going back to where he began. In today’s passage, he again stresses the importance of being patient and persevering under trials until the Lord’s coming. Notably, he talks a lot about prayer, praying in times of trouble, praying for the healing of the sick, praying for forgiveness, and praying for each other. James wanted to share as many spiritual instructions as possible. His instructions appear to be random and hard to catch the point. Yet, his conclusion seems clear in saying, *“Brothers and sisters, let’s all persevere, pray for each other, and seek God’s mercy in times of trouble.”*

 Chapter five begins with a stern warning against the rich oppressors (1-6). It’s not the first time James warned against the wealthy people in the church. In the first chapter, he said that rich believers should not take pride in their wealth but be humble before God (1:10-11). In chapter 2, he strictly warned against discrimination in the church based on socioeconomic status (2:8-12). In today’s passage, James again warns against the rich oppressors in the church. It makes some of us uncomfortable. But let’s see why he did it.

Look at verses 1-3. “Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming to you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.” We cannot say that being rich is sinful or against God’s will. In fact, who does not want to become rich? Who wants to be poor? James wasn’t targeting his remarks toward all the rich believers. He was warning against those who trust in their wealth rather than in God. Yet, we see many wealthy people do many good works in the world today. However, we know that it’s easier for rich people to idolize their wealth due to greed.

Why do people hoard their wealth more and more? It’s because they want to be happy. But that’s an illusion. James warns that kind of mentality by saying, “Weep and wail because of the misery is coming to you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.”

In verses 4-6, we see that the rich oppressors are guilty of accumulating their wealth at the expense of the poor, who labored and worked for them. Look at verses 4-6. “Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury ad self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.” James condemns the unethical act of the rich oppressors and the socio-economic injustice of his time.

In the early century, living as believers in Christ wasn’t easy. In addition to persecution, prejudice, and discrimination against Christianity, many had to survive their backbreaking labor and stress to survive. Besides their struggle for survival, they also had to face other trials in life, such as accidents, illnesses, unemployment, conflicts in the workplace, child-education problems, and marital and family conflicts. Most of them might have felt overwhelmed. We had to go through an unprecedented pandemic during the last two years. We are not out of the woods yet. Yet, we are now facing another global challenge due to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, which caused skyrocketing inflation. Our livelihood is being challenged more than ever. Now, what shall we do? I think we can get some wisdom from Pastor James’ final address in verses 7-20. We can sum up James’ spiritual guides in several points.

**First, “Learn To Be Patient” (7-10).** Look at 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, waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” In these verses, the phrase “Be patient” or the word “patiently” is repeated three times, and the term “the Lord’s coming” is repeated twice. It seems that after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the early Christians believed that the Lord’s coming was very near. Most of them, including Pastor James, Apostle Paul, and all the other apostles, thought that Christ would return to earth in their lifetime. Of course, it didn’t happen during the last 2000 years. Yet, we still believe that the Lord’s coming will happen anytime. If it does not occur in our lifetime, we will go to him in person through our death. But until then, we should learn to be patient. So what does it mean to be patient?

James said in verse 7b, “See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.” Farmers work hard for the harvest. But they are not in control over their crops. They have to depend on the weather condition, which is not under their control. After all, they must wait patiently until harvest time. They have no other choice. Impatience is a sign of unbelief.

Likewise, we should also patiently wait for Christ’s return, the spiritual harvest, which is the completion of God's salvation in us. As heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, we will receive the crown of life. Until then, we should continue to participate in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our day-to-day life, which requires patience.

It reminds me of the Hymn (Day by Day), ***“Day by day, and with each passing moment, Strength I find to meet my trials here. Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment, I’ve no cause for worry or for fear. He whose heart is kind beyond our measure, Gives unto each day what He deems best, Lovingly it’s part of pain and pleasure, Mingling toil with peace and rest.”*** (STL#105)

When James emphasized the importance of being patient, he indicated that Christian life is a life of self-discipline, different from shamanistic and fortune-seeking religions of the world. Life without self-discipline leads to living an unhealthy and unsatisfied life.

Look at verse 9. “Don’t grumble against one another, brother and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door.” When we face difficulties in life, we tend to grumble, especially against a situation or against those who seem to cause us pain and discomfort. We might think that grumbling isn’t as bad as criticizing or judging others. But according to James, grumbling is as bad as criticizing and judging others. It’s sinning against God.

It reminds us of what James said at the beginning of his book in 1:2-4, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Someone said that our happiness depends on our perspective. In other words, it’s our choice to be happy or moody. We are actually choosing either to be happy or grumpy.

 To be patient means not passively remaining in a grumpy mood. Instead, it means to endure hardship willingly in hope, which requires conscious choice and discipline. So, Pastor James presents several cases for his instruction. Read verses 10 and 11. “Brothers and sisters, 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 have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

The prime example of patience is the man named Job. I don’t know whether he was a historical person or not. But there is God’s message to us through Job’s life. He was blameless and upright, the most incredible man among all the people of the East (Job 1:3). In his godly fear, he shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yokes of oxen, 500 donkeys, and many servants. He was a billionaire and was a holy saint. Yet, one day, he lost everything he had; all of his ten children and wealth. Do you remember what he said? He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.” (Job 1:21) In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. Unbelievable.

And if that were not enough, he lost his health. He got terrible skin disease - the painful sores developed from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes (Pic#1). Looking at Job in the picture, can you imagine what sufferings he had to go through. His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!” What she meant was, *“Why don’t you kill yourself?*” But how did Job respond? Did he curse God and kill himself? No. Job 2:10b states, “In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.” That’s perseverance. We also know how the Lord restored Job’s life abundantly all over again.

What does the story of Job teach us? Again, I don’t know if Mr. Job was a real person in history. But his story teaches the blessed are those who persevere to the end. It also teaches that God is good all the time. Even though we don’t understand why certain things happen to us, we should trust that God is good all the time and he will work for our ultimate good. It reminds us of Romans 8:28-29, which states, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

Look at verse 12. ‘Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear- not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ Otherwise you will be condemned.” This verse seems out of context. Why does James suddenly talk about not swearing by anything? What does it have to do with being patient? It appears that swearing an oath by using God’s name or anything subtly reveals our impatience and unbelief. We don’t need to impress others by adding even God’s name. We should simply say “Yes” or “No.”

When we face troubles of many kinds, how can we remain trusting God and being patient? There is a phrase I like, ***“Let go and let God.”*** (Pic#2) One interpretation of this phrase is, *“Don’t hold on to anything. Let go of everything so that you may only depend on God.”* It may be scary to let go of everything we rely upon. But when we do, we can truly let God be God of all. So what are we afraid of losing? “Let Go, Let God!” That’s what it means to be patient.

**Second, we should learn to trust God in prayer (13-20).** In verses 13-18, Pastor James gives his final admonishment by encouraging his audience to pray. Look at verses 13-16. “Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” In these verses, we find the word **“prayer”** repeated about seven times.

While he encourages us to pray always, especially in times of trouble, he also encourages us to sing songs of praise when we are happy. It means that prayer and praise are closely related: praise is a form of prayer with melody and rhythm. Both prayer and praise are the way of deep communion with God tour Father. But when we pray, we should not doubt but trust in God’s love and faithfulness. We, as Christian disciples, always live in the presence and bosom of God our Father (Pic#3).

James also said that those who are sick should ask the church elders to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. It does not mean that we should ask elders to heal us through prayer instead of seeking medical assistance when we have a virus infection. If we do that in our church, we will spread the virus instead of healing. James’ point is not to ignore medical science. Instead, he seems to say that prayer offered to God by faith has an overarching effect of healing because God is the one who heals us either through medicine or through the act of loving care and compassion.

 Look at verse 16. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” This verse implies that we should pray for healing our body, our emotion, heart, and relations. This kind of healing comes from above when we are honest, humble, and willing to repent before God and forgive one another. I know we have experienced this healing repeatedly, and it should continue. After all, we should not be judgmental of anyone. Under the judgmental and critical atmosphere, no one would feel comfortable being honest and transparent. God is full of compassion and mercy. Building a non-judgmental, loving, and safe spiritual environment and community is not easy but necessary.

 In verses 19-20, James concludes that the Christian community is where God’s grace abounds through the forgiveness of sins. “My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” Helping someone wrong is not easy at all. With a critical and judgmental attitude, it’s impossible. We need humility before the Lord, both individually and collectively, as the body of Christ. The Bible declares that no one is righteous, not even one (Ro. 3:10). All of us are imperfect and only forgiven sinners who constantly need God’s mercy. The church is not the gathering of righteous people but the group of forgiven sinners. Otherwise, we are nothing but Christian hypocrites. Our community should be full of God’s grace. Where there is God’s grace, the multitude of sins are covered.

 We have learned a lot through the study of James. Now, it’s time for us to practice what we have learned. That can be a real challenge. But we can become mature only when we practice what we have learned one by one. May we continue to persevere in trials of many kinds, offer our prayer and sing songs of praises to the Lord, who is merciful and sovereign overall. Life in this world is always challenging, especially times like today. We surely must learn to let go of everything and let God be in control of our day-to-day lives. Most of all, may we build a community of love, forgiveness, and compassion among us. It can all start when each of us decides to obey God’s command to love one another (Pic#4).

I believe that’s the beginning of the new revival in the days to come. May we conclude the study of James by reading today’s key verse, verse11. “As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”