

HG23: James 6/6

Patience In Suffering

James 5:7-20

Home Group Sermon Notes

22nd November 2009 - Revd Paul A. Carr



Introduction: *“Patience is a virtue, possess it if you can. Seldom found in a woman, never in a man.”* Is patience difficult for you? Do you have it in abundance or short supply? It seems to me there is always something to try our patience. We wait in traffic and we wait in queues. We wait for our children to grow into responsible adults. Every day of our life presents many opportunities for training in patience. We can accept it, resent it, and even become good at it! But one thing is certain - we can't avoid it.

1) Be Patient - It will be Worth the Wait! Patience doesn't come easily. It seems there's always a price to pay. We've all experienced the hurt of mistreatment and misunderstanding. Such hurts come in a variety of forms: intolerable work situations; domestic conflicts; difficult relatives; individuals who take advantage of us; friends (so called) who turn against us; neighbours who believe false things about us; and dozens of other hurtful circumstances. Our natural tendency is to retaliate, to return evil for evil, to get even, or to hold a grudge and become bitter. But James says: 'be patient.'

The word patience comes to us from the combination of two Greek words (*makros*) which means “far away” and (*thumos*) which means “anger, heat or rage.” Be patient (*makrothumia*) in Greek means, literally, “long tempered.” We know this passage is addressed to believers and James is suggesting that this kind of patience can only be achieved by a Christian. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit. It is a characteristic of God's Spirit living within us. As such, it is one of those things that **should** set the believer apart from the world.

Perhaps we might hear the Lord speak to us about patience in our own lives today, that is, if we are not in too much of a hurry. I'm sure we've all heard the expression; I need patience - and I need it RIGHT NOW!!! So often, we find ourselves in a hurry, only to find out that God isn't!

The Farmer (vs7): James gives a classic illustration of patience when he says, “*see how the farmer waits*” - the farmer is patient because the value of the harvest justifies the wait. When the seed is planted and everything is done in the initial stage, he doesn't go off and retire. He is busy working in another area of the farm, patiently waiting for the time of harvest.

Job (vs11): “*You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.*” Job was blessed above every other man of his day. He was prosperous and it seemed he had everything his heart desired. Then suddenly, it all changed. He lost all his property, his possessions, his family and his health. Job didn't understand what was happening, or why? But he knew his life was in God's hands. In the face of unexplained suffering Job is an amazing model of endurance under tremendous testing.

Have you ever reached the point where there seems to be no purpose in living anymore and your faith is just draining away? Have you ever said to yourself: 'I'm so weary of being a Christian - I just want to be with Jesus'? They are a lot of weary pilgrims around, folk who've been really 'long tempered' as James said we should be, but are really struggling. And so, if you are feeling a little bit like that, James gives us this next bit of advice:

2) Be Patient - Strengthen your Relationship with the Lord. In vs8a, James gives us a command: ‘*Stand firm.*’ Instead of feeling agitated and shaken up by the experience of oppression, we are to ‘*stand firm*’. We are to develop an inner sense of stability. We are to patiently strengthen ourselves against the sin and temptation and trials of the world, and we can do this by strengthening our hearts. To strengthen our hearts is to strengthen our relationship with the Lord. There are three ways this can be done: 1) Strengthening your hearts requires prayer - ‘Daily Prayers for the Armour of God’; 2) Strengthening your hearts requires the study of God's word; 3) Strengthening your heart requires fellowship with other Christians - not just church, home groups are as good a place as any.

But you don't really need patience when everything around you is going all right. You need it when life is hard. The Bible often talks about tribulation working patience in us. Suffering and patience seem to go hand in hand. What do we usually do when we begin to feel the heat? We complain to anyone who'll listen. We lash out at others because of the pressure we are feeling - we looked at this in some depth when we looked at 4:1-12. Impatience with our circumstances leads to impatience with God, which in turn leads to impatience with God's people. “*To walk in love the saints above, will be a wondrous glory; But to walk below with the folks we know, well that's another story.*”

3) Prayer as a Response to Suffering. But when difficulties arise and patience is required, what is the answer? Prayer. James asks the most obvious of questions here, vs13: *Is anyone of you in trouble?* Hmmmm, that's a difficult one, let me think about that! You can almost hear his readers responding: *Yes, we all are!* James' prescription for this problem is to: *pray*. Prayer has to be our first response to suffering. We pray for our enemies, we pray for our persecutors, we pray for the circumstances around us, we pray for God's hand in any given situation.

On the opposite side of the coin James asks: “*Is anyone happy?*” Actually, it's a bit more than that. The actual phrase is 'in good heart' and that's a much better interpretation. For instance, when Paul is in the middle of a shipwreck or in the middle of the raging storm at sea, he didn't come up on the deck and start singing 'I am H.A.P.P.Y!' What Paul says is: 'be of good heart (Acts 27:22,25). Be of good heart; though the storm rages round you, God is going to do something amazing.

4) Prayer as a Response to Sickness. One of the strongest passages on prayer in the NT is found in these verses and is it for this prayer that James is mostly known. Vs14-15a: *“Is anyone among you sick? 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.* So what are principles James lays down for us:

The Elders are to be Summoned: The sick person must take the initiative to summon the elders. It doesn't mean 'I've got a sore throat, I'll nip into bed and ring the Rector, so he can come round.' The reason the elders come to the bedside is because the patient is too ill to go to the church.

The Elders are to Come and Pray over the Sick Person: It was the custom of the Synagogue that the elders would come together at such a time as this, so James was Christianising the Jewish tradition and he sees this as the task of the elders of the church.

The Elders are to Anoint with Oil in the Name of the Lord: Oil, in the Bible, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Good Samaritan bandaged up the traveller using oil. When the disciples were sent out they were anointed with oil. And so we come to vs15, a verse which has proved to be quite controversial, over the years, and so I'm going to take it as carefully as I can. Not because I don't believe in the power of Jesus to heal, because I believe he can. But rather, because we need to understand exactly what it is James is saying here.

According to the NIV, James says, 'And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well,' If you've got an older version of the Bible, KJV or similar, you'll see that it says, 'the prayer of faith will save the sick', What does the Greek say? *Sozo* 'Save' it doesn't say, 'will make him well' it says it will save him, and that's very important to bear in mind. This passage is also the one that 'faith healers' use to support their work and they say that when no healing takes place, it's due to a lack of faith in the recipient. I remember, a few years ago, reading about a group of medical students who got carried away with the idea that all you had to do was lay hands on people, anoint them, and they would be healed. They said, 'We're going to clear out the wards the Hospital by praying over patients armed with this text in our hands.' Great faith indeed, but the NT doesn't teach this. The apostle Paul did not heal Timothy. He urged him to take a normal medicinal remedy for a chronic stomach condition: "*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses*" (1 Tim. 5:23). Even Paul himself, in 2 Corinthians 12, wasn't healed from his thorn in the flesh. Is it because sickness is part of man's mortality? So why is it some of our prayers for healing are sometimes not answered? I'll try to give some reasons why, first from our side, as it were, and then from God's.

5) Some Reasons why not Everyone is Healed: Our Side. There may, for example, be a lack of faith on the part of those who are praying for healing. When the disciples fail to heal a demonised boy, Jesus implies that it is due to their lack of faith. When he hears about the mess they'd made of their attempt to help the boy, Jesus declares: 'O unbelieving and perverse generation' (Matthew 17:16). There may, also, be a general atmosphere of unbelief, which inhibits healing. Mark writes that Jesus could not perform any miracles in his own town because of the unbelief of the locals (Mark 6:1-4). So lack of faith can be a reason why people are not healed. However, we should note that this lack of faith is located in the people praying (and in the local community) rather than in the person receiving prayer. A second reason why healing may not occur is because some hidden sin is acting as an obstacle to God's power and it's here that James's teaching is particularly challenging, vs16: "*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*" It's particularly important for any anger or unforgiveness to be exposed if healing is to occur. Physical sicknesses can often be caused by a deep root of bitterness. As Jesus said: '*Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone*' (Mark 11:25). Until that is dealt with, then the 'prayer of faith' will not be possible. It's worth noting, here, that the effectiveness of healing prayer is not just dependent on the sick person's confession, but also on the confession of those who are doing the praying.

6) Some Reasons why not Everyone is Healed: God's Side. A first reason, has to do with God's sovereignty. He decides those who will be healed and those who won't. We may feel that there's something completely random about God's choice in this regard, but that is simply because of our limited, finite perspective. The truth is, God knows what is best for us and for the world. It is his plan not ours that matters. Sometimes this will mean only one person in the crowd being healed, as happened at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-14.

I've prayed with many people over the years, some have been healed in, what can only be described as miraculous circumstances and other times without any physical healing at all. I, like you, don't have all the answers, but I have learned to trust, implicitly, in God's sovereign will. We also need to understand that healing isn't always physical; it's about spiritual healing too (Jesus came to make us whole (Ephesians 6:18): Body, soul and spirit). Whilst some folk *are* healed physically, it doesn't delay the inevitable. We're all going to die, physically, some day. If you pardon the use of a racing pun: 'It's a dead cert!' Even those Jesus healed, died. We have no choice – it's the curse of this world.

However, we do have a choice as to whether we want to be healed spiritually. As an old phrase goes: "*The loss of gold is much, the loss of health is more, but the loss of Jesus Christ is such that no man can restore.*" And I tell you, if judgment and separation from God is as frightening as the Bible says it is, then we all want to be right with God. Spiritual healing is much more important. This is what James means when he writes the prayer of faith will save them and what he confirms in vs20: '*Whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*'

7) The Prayer of a Righteous Man. Elijah is cited as an example of prayer, even though he had a lot of doubts, towards God, in his life. It helps us to know that he wasn't an armour-plated Christian. He wept his heart out and suffered spiritual depression. He was a person like us; and thank you, Lord, for that. Elijah 'prayed earnestly' for three years (1 Kings 17:1 & 18:41-46). Why? Because God had convicted him that this was His will and, boy, what answers he received: the very forces of nature were changed! How many of you have stopped praying for things that are close to your heart? Have you stopped praying for your husband or wife or children to come to know Jesus? Have you stopped praying for your colleagues and friends? Have you stopped praying for revival in our church and community? Don't stop praying ...

Don't stop praying. This kind of earnest prayer is possible for all believers. How? Because Elijah was a just a man just like us. As we seek to become more effective in our praying, we would do well to heed the words of William Law: "*It is not the arithmetic of our prayers, how many they are; nor the rhetoric of our prayers, how eloquent they be; nor the geometry of our prayers, how long they be; nor the music of our prayers, how sweet our voice may be; nor the method of our prayers, how orderly they may be; nor even the theology of our prayers, how good the doctrine may be—which God cares for. It is the fervency of spirit that avails much.*"

Conclusion. Many of the issues we've looked at during this series on James are summed up in that wonderful hymn by Joseph Scriven: *What a friend we have in Jesus*. Joseph Scriven wrote this hymn as a response to a crisis of faith after enduring the agony of his first fiancé dying from TB and his second fiancé drowning on the eve of their wedding day. Joseph Scriven knew what it meant to be '*weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care.*' However, despite all the pain and agony he was experiencing, Joseph Scriven knew that Jesus was one who understood, and the one to whom he could bring his '*sins and grief's to bear.*' He knew, through personal experience, the reality of the line: '*What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.*'

Prayer is the link that connects us with God. It is the bridge that spans every gulf and bears us over every abyss of danger or of need ... Do we know the power of our supernatural weapon? Do we dare to use it with the authority of a faith that commands as well as asks? God grant us holy audacity and divine confidence. He is not wanting great men, but He is wanting men that will dare to prove the greatness of their God. Anonymous

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

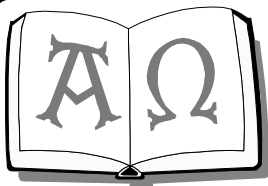
Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins):

Paul used a Bob Dylan song in his sermon: do you have a favourite 'pop' song that contains, in some way or another, a Christian message that is helpful to you? If so, share this with the other members of your group.



Looking Upwards - Worship (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - Bible Study (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

- 1) Does patience come easily to you? What really gets you angry? (Go on, be honest!)
- 2) Read the section '*Be Patient – Strengthen your Relationship with the Lord.*' In what ways have you found your patience and faith strengthened?
- 3) Read the section '*Prayer as a Response to Suffering.*' What do you make of the translation of 'happy' to 'be of good heart'? Do you think it makes any difference? Why, why not?
- 4) Read James 5:14-16a. Do you believe that God always heals? Do you agree with some of Paul's suggestions (from our side and God's side) as to why this may not always be the case? Might there be others?
- 5) Do you have experience of a healing miracle in your own, or in someone else's life?

6) Read James 5:16b-18 (1 Kings 17:1 & 18:41-46). Elijah prayed earnestly for three years and received a remarkable answer to prayer. What are you praying earnestly for at this moment in time?

7) James has been an informative, challenging and encouraging book in many different ways. What, out of all we have studied, really sticks in your mind? What has strengthened your faith the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life as a result of this series?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

