

SESSION NINE

Living with Suffering (*James 5:7-12*)

"The greatest good suffering can do for me is to increase my capacity for God."
~ Joni Eareckson Tada

I. Overview

Indicative of wisdom literature, the Book of James addresses how to live with suffering. So in fact, this topic becomes the very "bookends" to James' epistle. James breaches the subject of true faith in the midst of suffering at the beginning of the epistle (1:2-18), and he now returns to this topic in this final chapter. In 5:7-12, James repeats the call to "be patient" (vv. 7 and 8) and also the need "to endure" (vv. 10 and 11) in the midst of life's difficulties. The encouragement to remain patient and to persevere rests in the hope of the promise of the "eschatological reversal."

II. The Content

A. Patience in Suffering (5:7-11)

v. 7 - The "coming of Christ" refers to the Lord's return—either in the context of rescuing the righteous (cf. 1 Thess 4:15) or in the deliverance of judgment upon the wicked (cf. 2 Thess 2:8).

"patience" - This term denotes a long-suffering attitude towards others (cf. 1 Cor 13:4; Eph 4:2; 1 Thess 5:14).

"endurance" - This word denotes "a strong, determined fortitude with which we need to face difficult circumstances (Rom 8:25; 2 Cor 1:6; 2 Thess 1:4)" (Moo, *James*, 222).

"early and late rains" - The early rains normally lasted from mid-October to mid-November while the late rains spanned key portions of March and April. Figuratively, the phrase is used frequently in the Old Testament to speak of the Lord's faithfulness to His people (cf. Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech 10:1).

v. 8 - The call to "stand firm" conveys the notion of spiritual steadfastness—an unwavering in one's heart (1 Thess 3:2; 2 Thess 2:17; 3:3; 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 1:12).

The coming of the Lord mentioned in verse 7 is now clarified. It is a coming that is imminent (cf. Rom 13:12; 1 Pet 4:7). The Lord's coming also speaks of the "eschatological reversal"—a time when the righteous will finally be vindicated (cf. Isa 61:3).

v. 9 - The "groaning" and "complaining" are terms often associated with oppression (cf. Exod 2:23).

vv. 10-11 - Matthew 5:11-12 and Hebrews 11:36 both reflect on the prophets as martyrs. As aptly noted by Dan McCartney in his commentary on this epistle: "James refers to these OT [Old Testament] examples of faith to show not how extraordinary people of extraordinary power did marvels, but how ordinary people who shared the common human experience of suffering became extraordinary through their persevering faith in the

face of adversity. Thus, the blessedness of the prophets involves not their happiness in their earthly lives, but their wholeness in relationship to God.” (*James*, 243).

Job seems an unlikely paradigm for patience. If anything, the Book of Job seems to portray an impatient character—one who complains to God about the injustice of his suffering. However, James is speaking of a persevering type of patience—a type marked by fortitude. Certainly, Job challenged God’s justice, but he never cursed God. At the end of the day, Job never gave up (Job 42:7).

One commentator writes, “Job’s [submission] is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart.” (Barclay, *Letters of James and Peter*, 147-48).

“seen the Lord’s purpose” - The word “end” can be translated as purpose, result, or termination point. Consequently, this portion of this verse could be rendered as follows:

- the end of the Lord’s life and earthly ministry
- the end of the age
- the end result of Job’s story
- the purpose for Job’s trials

The context of James would suggest that James is focusing on the purpose of Job’s sufferings. Job had the opportunity of experiencing the Lord’s provisions and a deeper knowledge of the Lord.

v. 12 - This final warning of rash speech not only echoes the use of the tongue throughout this epistle, but the caution also is an implied lesson from the life of Job. We should speak with integrity.

McCartney notes, “The use of oaths, then, is contrary to faith; it marks unbelief. Faith always means yes when it says yes; that is, people of faith have no need of oaths, either to give their words weight or to prompt a solution to suffering; they wait patiently and prayerfully for the Lord and always keep their promises, cognizant that God always keeps his.” (*James*, 247).

The similarities between James 5:12 and Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:34-37 are striking.

B. Comparisons with Psalm 37

Psalm 37:1-9

James 5:7-12

III. Intersect

In the book of James, the subject of suffering contains the following three key principles:

- A. Suffering is inevitable for those who follow Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 -

- B. Suffering serves as a powerful training ground for spiritual growth and maturity.

It is not the suffering that produces maturity, but rather, it is the faithful endurance in the midst of suffering that produces spiritual growth.

Romans 5:3-4 -

- C. Suffering calls for the believer to live by faith. As we have noted in James, suffering is a test of one's faith.

1 Peter 1:6-7 -

- D. Perseverance in the midst of suffering affords the Lord's provisions in this age and for all of eternity!

1 Peter 4:12-14 -

"There are no sins God's people are more subject to than unbelief and impatience. They are ready either to faint through unbelief, or to fret through impatience." ~ Thomas Watson