

James 5:1-12

Riches and Suffering

James has been talking about very practical things: dealing with trials and temptations, showing favoritism, controlling the tongue, submission to God, boasting, and this is his third reference to the rich! This is important.

Verses 1-6

What is the misery James is warning the rich people about? Eternal misery. Judgment. **Why? Because they're rich?** No, because of what they were doing with their riches..

Are there examples of rich people in the Bible? Yes! Abram (Genesis 13:2), Solomon (1 Kings 3:13), Job (Job 42:10), the rich young man (Matthew 19:16-22), and Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57)

Did God criticize or condemn them for being rich? Only the rich young man because he wasn't willing to give up his riches.

What are the specific criticisms James levels against these rich people?

1. Hoarding wealth—the Bible does not discourage saving, or even investing; but it does condemn hoarding
2. Acquiring wealth by wrong means—withholding pay, dishonesty, insensitivity to people's needs
3. Luxurious living—self indulgence
4. Condemned and murdered innocent people—stepped on people on their way up the ladder

Is it wrong to be wealthy? Riches present a stewardship challenge. Those whom James indicts are ignoring/abusing their stewardship responsibilities. You and I may *possess* many things, but we do not *own* them. God is the Owner of everything. We are His stewards.

Wouldn't we all like to be wealthy? Most rich people are happy they are rich, but they may not be happy with the state of their lives. It's tempting to say, "Give me his money and let me try and be happy." or "I could be rich and still serve God." We may think riches are nice, but they present very real temptations. More Christians can handle adversity than prosperity.

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." —Proverbs 30:8-9

Application: James' major focus is on hoarding. How does that apply to you?

How full are your closets? How many pairs of shoes do you have? If you haven't used it this year, do you give it away? When you get an inheritance or a gift do you tithe? When you are strapped financially, remember the widow's mite in Luke 21:1-4. Jesus commended her for giving two very small copper coins in the temple offering.

Verses 7-11

Who is James addressing? Brothers, fellow believers

Why does James tell them to be patient? The Lord's coming is near. Think eternally. Don't focus on the temporary.

What is the illustration of the patient farmer designed to tell us? God is in control and He will provide what you need. Have an eternal perspective.

When the Jews were in Egypt, farming was done very differently from farming in Israel. The difference lies between land that is irrigated and land that is watered by rain. In Egypt farming was facilitated by irrigation from the Nile River. One sees the same thing in California and other places where watering is done by irrigation. There is an irrigation ditch nearby that is filled with water, and all one has to do is to push some dirt with his foot to start the water flowing along a particular trench. That's how easy it was.

It was too easy for God's people in Egypt, agriculturally speaking. They could farm without having to exercise faith in God. God wanted His people to learn to trust Him for their daily bread and for their every need. And so He took them to a land that was not watered by irrigation, but by rain. He promised that if His people would abide by His law, He would give them the rains they needed—in the proper time. This meant that the farmer had to start the farming season when there was no hint of rain on the horizon. He had to cultivate his fields to prepare them for his crops. Then he had to plant the seed. All of this seems to have been done before any rains had yet come. The farmer went about his labors, trusting in God to bless his efforts, but not seeing any evidence of the coming rain while he worked. Then, having done what he could, the farmer had to patiently wait for the rains God had promised. The first rains came early to cause the seed to grow, and then more time passed. Finally, the latter rains came to bring the crop to maturity. Farming in Israel required working and waiting on God. It required walking by faith and not by sight.

We are not farmers, so how does this apply to us? We need to remember that God is in control, He will provide. He is coming back. Lots of people are struggling with uncertain futures. We need patience—not something that we naturally possess. How can we get

patience? Ask God! Patience is a supernatural thing that only God can provide. Our job to put ourselves in a position to receive patience by walking in the Spirit, confessing sin, and having unhindered fellowship with God.

You might have heard it said, “Don’t ask God for patience whatever you do. He will dump a big trial on you.” That is a poor concept of God. Is there an example in the Bible of asking for patience and being rewarded with a trial? No!

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” —Matthew 7:9-11

If we ask, will He give us the antithesis of what we ask for? It is God’s desire that we be patient, so ask Him for patience. It’s the same with all the fruit of the Spirit—joy, peace, etc.

Application: What are some circumstances that tempt you to lose your patience?

Remember the Lord is coming back. These issues are unimportant in light of that fact.

In the midst of teaching about patience, James warns Christians against what? Grumbling against each other.

What are the root causes of grumbling among us? Ungratefulness, comparing ourselves with others, selfishness, uncertainty

Who does James use as an example of patience in verse 10? Prophets.

Why? These were men who spoke God’s truth to a sinful generation and paid a high price for doing so. They were ignored, rejected, abused, and even killed because of their words. The Jews looked upon them as heroes, and rightly so. James is therefore saying something like: “You honor the prophets and regard them as heroes, precisely because they endured in the midst of adversity. You should imitate them by persevering under trial.”

Application: When you think of being patient who do you think of and why?

What does it mean to persevere? Be confident that God will prevail in the end.

Who does James use as an example of perseverance in verse 11? Job.

How was Job blessed because of his perseverance? “The Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first.” —Job 42:12. Imagine the change in Job’s relationship with God: more intimate, more glorifying to God, greater confidence in God. Job is the picture of James 1:2-3.

Who else in the Bible persevered? Paul, the apostles, the prophets, Jesus

Verse 12

What kind of swearing is James talking about? “I swear to God.” “As God is my judge.”

Why do people swear with oaths instead of just using their word? What’s the issue with oaths? Character. Trust.

The need to swear or make oaths, beyond a simple and clear *yes* or *no*, betrays the weakness of your word. It demonstrates that there is not enough weight in your own character to confirm your words. Others should not need some further affirmation of truthfulness from us than our words themselves. Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct and complete.

MEMORIZE: James 5:8