

# THURSDAY 08 September 2022 "Patience in Pain"

## James 5:1-11

Hello, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Do you sometimes find yourself struggling to understand the increasingly wide gap between the extremely wealthy and the extremely poor people in our world? *Of course, wealth and poverty have always been part of human society in every part of the world and that's why God speaks to the issue of finances so often in the Bible.*

Let's rejoin the apostle James as he's writing his letter of encouragement and instruction to Jewish Jesus followers all across the Roman Empire in about the year 48ad. We believe James was writing from Jerusalem and that city then, as every city today, had the entire spectrum of economic status. The begging poor sat on every street corner. Slaves who had indentured themselves simply to survive worked the menial tasks like animals of burden. Hard working people and even wealthy people were plentiful and a few extremely wealthy lived in their mansions. Relationships among those various categories of people were strained then as it often is in our day where you and I live.

So, James picks up his stylus and rolls out the parchments again, ready to continue writing, now his fifth chapter of this letter. ***"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you! ... You have hoarded wealth. Look! The wages you failed to pay your workers are crying out against you. The cries of those workers have reached the ears of the LORD Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence... You have condemned the innocent one who was not opposing you."*** (James 5:1-6)

Look around the room where James is writing. What do you see, my friends? James always welcomes those who want to witness this miracle of the Holy Spirit guiding James to write. They listen as James speaks the words as he writes them. The poor among these folks are smiling! The more wealthy are squirming. *Then as now a great deal of the wealth had been achieved or accumulated by taking advantage of others.*

It happens in our day when employers pay refugees by cash so they don't have to pay taxes and the refugee won't have to report income, but almost always these people are paid well below market wage, but to whom can they complain without being deported? It happens when vendors charge far more than market price for items or services, especially if they have no competition. *Dishonesty, injustice, taking advantage of others is normal real life in the world where ethics and morals have been long ago compromised.* So, is that how things are where you live?

The Holy Spirit led James to write these words so everyone, the poor and the wealthy, would be fully aware that GOD doesn't miss anything! *His eyes see it all, in every place and a full accounting for every person will eventually take place, standing face to face before God as the great judge and everything will be laid bare, everything!* (Heb. 4:13)

In view of those two realities, the unethical conditions in our world and the eventual accounting for all before Holy God as Judge, how then should we act, was the unspoken question on the minds of almost everyone. The Holy Spirit knew that and led James to continue writing: **"Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop... you too be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."** (James 5:7,8)

For the Jewish Christians in the first century, they understood fully what James was calling them to do. *Patience was a hallmark life principle for the Jews*, God's people, going all the way back to Abraham who along with Sarah his wife waited 25 years for Isaac, the miracle son God promised them. Joseph was a slave and prisoner 13 years in Egypt, before God gave him the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dream and he was elevated from slave to Prime Minister of Egypt. The Hebrew slaves had been in slavery, crying out to God for deliverance, about 300 years before Moses was raised up by God, and God's mighty plagues rescued them, and Moses led them through the Red Sea to freedom.

*Yes, PATIENCE was a deeply rooted reality in the Jewish story, but did you notice what James is urging his listeners to wait for?* Twice in two verses James speaks of **'the Lord's coming'**! James had been there on the hillside when the resurrected Jesus said farewell and ascended into heaven. As James and the others stood there gazing up into the sky James heard the two angels proclaim: **"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven."** (Acts 1:11)

I imagine for James, even though it had been about 20 years since that day, those words resonated in his mind and heart often! Perhaps James even asked himself from time to time, *'Could it be today? Could Jesus return to Jerusalem today? And if He did, what would I do?'*

Perhaps as James was writing this, he put down his stylus and looked right into the eyes of those watching him and asked... *'So my friends, what about you? Do you think the risen Jesus could return today? And if He did, what would you do?'* May I ask you the same questions my dear friends all around the world? And what is your answer?

James picked up his stylus... **"Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. Look, the Judge is standing at the door!"** (James 5:9) I wonder if those in James' little house turned to look at the door expecting to see someone there? Did you notice James capitalized the word **'Judge'**.

They all understood. *The Lord Jesus is returning soon and when He comes, He'll come as judge and His justice will be holy and pure and fully accurate.*

James knew that as the people would read these words, those Jews who lived with injustice would read these words taking great encouragement. But those, especially unethical Jewish wealthy people would read these words with anxiety, maybe even fear and worry. I can see James getting up from his stool again and going to the window to watch the busy street. Perhaps he was thinking, *'And what would happen right here, on this busy street, if suddenly Jesus returned, right now!'* Do you ever think that, my friends?

James continued writing: ***"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...the LORD is full of compassion and mercy."*** (James 5:10,11) Do you notice James' repeated use of the phrase **'brothers and sisters'**? Do you wonder why? I celebrate it, for I think James is doing two important things.

***First***, he's reminding all his Jewish readers that they are united together as the Hebrew family of God's chosen people, with their shared ancestral roots going all the way back to Abraham.

***Secondly***, James is reminding these Jewish Jesus followers that Jesus has united them with each other AND with all Gentile Jesus followers as brothers and sisters in Christ in the global family of God!!

Do you sometimes find yourself overwhelmed with that concept? Can you imagine how many Asian brothers and sisters you have, if you have trusted Jesus to be your Savior? Maybe nearly 400 million! Or how many African brothers and sisters? Maybe about 200 million? And how many South American brothers and sisters? Perhaps 250 million or more!

For these Jewish Christians when James mentioned their prophets who had great patience in suffering, immediately into their minds would come Jeremiah or Isaiah or Ezekiel or Elijah or what we call the 'minor' prophets. Some years later the writer of Hebrews put it this way: ***"There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released...some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two, they were killed by the sword. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith..."*** (Hebrews 11:35-39) Yes, it was true James, these men and women were held in the highest of esteem for their courage and faith and perseverance in the face of suffering. They became great examples of standing firm in the strength of God while facing horrendous injustice and persecution.

James put down his stylus. Everyone in the room has their heads bowed, tears streaming down their faces. Oh, such a rich heritage of godly men and women who have paid such a high price to pass along their heritage of faithfulness, patience and godliness to this generation. Now these, as followers of Jesus, who paid the ultimate price, as their Lord and Savior and soon coming King, yes, yes, we can find the same patience and trust in God to hold our heads up and stand firm in our suffering.

Let's pause here with them, pondering the price paid by those who've gone before us and the price we are being asked to pay as followers of Jesus, if we are going to be faithful and pass to the next generation a clear understanding of God honoring perseverance and patience in the face of pain. What is Jesus saying into your hearts right now friends? Here's a song to help us consider this...

**Today's Scripture is James 5:1-11.**