

Christ Reformation Church

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A Faith that Works The Epistle of James

***You see that a person is
justified by works and not by
faith alone. (2:24)***

***“Patience and Prayer as We
Await the Lord’s Coming”***

October 18, 2015

Sermon Text: James 5:7-12

Scripture Reading: Job 1

Introduction-

James 5:7-20 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. (8) You also, be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

(9) Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

(10) As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (11) Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

(12) But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

(13) Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. (14) 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. (15) And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

(17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. (18) Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

(19) My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, (20) let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

In our ministry at A Cry for Justice, we cry for *justice*. But we don't always see it. In fact, we don't see it very often at all. You all have read the accounts of the many victims we deal with and you have seen how apparently hopeless many of those situations are. You don't know what to tell such people, though you wish you

could go to them, remove them from their bondage, give them a new house, and effect justice on their oppressor. But we can't. In fact there are many things we still could not do even if we had millions of dollars at hand. We could not, for example, raise from the dead those who have been murdered.

James is addressing the suffering of the Christian in this evil world. He began his letter that way –

James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

Suffering at the hands of the wicked. Suffering from physical ailments. Suffering that brings up those age-old questions: *If God is love, how can these things be? Why doesn't the Lord do something about this? Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Why do the children suffer?* The problem and question of *evil* you see.

Christians in particular are marked out for suffering and persecution while here in enemy territory. The world and its demon-god hate the Christian because they hate Christ. Jesus warned us of this so that we would not be shaken when this hatred comes our way.

James addresses these very subjects as he comes to the end of his letter/sermon. He points us toward two aspects of genuine faith in Christ that see us through to the end:

- Steadfast, patient, unshaken faith that the Lord is coming.
- The prayer of faith

Patient, Unshaken Faith

Listen to it again:

James 5:7-9 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. (8) You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (9) Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

The word “patient” occurs three times here. It is right to be angry at injustice. It is right to work to do something about it and about other kinds of suffering we see in this life, like illness. But in the end this present world is going to remain filled with wickedness, injustice, and suffering. That is, until Christ the perfect Judge comes again to set it all right.

James says, as does the entire New Testament, that the coming of the Lord is *near*. You see it in these two phrases:

- The coming of the Lord is at hand
- Behold, the Judge is standing at the door

Ever since Christ’s work on the cross was finished and Satan was defeated, ever since Christ rose again and ascended into heaven, *His coming has been imminent*. Because at that point, *the last days* began. The present church age is the last era of this world before the kingdom of God breaks in in all its fullness. There is nothing else that must happen. Christ is coming and He could come at any moment, in fact, He is at the door with, you might say, His hand on the door knob.

As always, James’ words here are filled with Old Testament allusions and images. For example, in his farming illustration he mentions the “early and late rains” which come and bring about growth and the harvest. Rain was one of the blessings for Israel when they obeyed the covenant, while a drought was the curse for disobedience. This phrase about rain was also used figuratively. Notice also that this one from Hosea is a very clear prophecy of the resurrection of Christ:

Hosea 6:1-3 "Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. (2) After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. (3) Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."

And again in Joel 2, which is a key text of Scripture in regard to the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the new church:

Joel 2:23-24 "Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. (24) "The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

And so in these evil days, we must be *patient*, persevering in faith that the Lord is coming and is going to put everything right. We must not be like the Israelites in the wilderness who, when they were thirsty, grumbled against the Lord and against Moses and against one another. That is a mark of unbelief.

John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Things are not as they seem. Things are not as they are always going to be. The wicked may appear to be prospering, but it is short-lived:

James 5:4-5 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (5) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

Listen to it from Paul-

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering-- (6) since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who

do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, (10) when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Every person in the Bible who was called by the Lord to speak for Him, suffered.

How is the rest of your life on this earth going to go? None of us know. But we can be quite sure that suffering of various types lies ahead. Death, illness, betrayals, maybe poverty...things we would never put in the script of our lives if we were the authors. So the question is, how will we react when these things come – and most surely they will come. James says, *be patient. Establish your hearts firmly in faith, knowing that this present fallen world with all its evil is not forever.* In fact, in the blink of an eye it is going to go away.

The Faith of the Prophets

Examples of courage and faith always help, and the Bible is filled with them. James points us to the OT prophets, and one in particular:

James 5:10-11 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. (11) Behold, we

Hebrews 11:35-40 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (36) Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- (38) of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Abraham knew that his inheritance *was not going to be on this present earth, but in the new creation.* This

was the “something better” that Hebrews mentions here and which all these faithful people looked to. See it? If you are looking for your reward, for your real “life” in this present life and world, you are going to be quite disappointed. In THIS world we have trouble. But those OT prophets like Job knew that the promises of God in Christ are going to be realized only partially here and now, and fully in the new creation. This is how they persevered in faith and were not devastated in their sufferings. They didn’t yield to the lies launched at them by the wicked who called them fools for their faith.

Here is the truth, as evidenced in Job’s example: *the Lord is compassionate and merciful*. Just as Job was restored with an even better life than before, so it will be for everyone of us who remain steadfast in our faith in Christ’s promises. A better life is coming. It is right at the door.

Job 42:10-17 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. (11) Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had

brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. (12) And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. (13) He had also seven sons and three daughters. (14) And he called the name of the first daughter Jemimah, and the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-happuch. (15) And in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters. And their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. (16) And after this Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. (17) And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

Only for us, delete the last line!

Do Not Swear

Now right in the midst of things, just before James gets on with his discussion of prayer, you have this:

James 5:12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

And we feel like, “James, did you cut and paste this in and get it in the wrong place? Did you just realize as you approach the end of your letter that you forgot to say this earlier so you just put it in here?” Because it doesn’t seem connected to the context, does it?

On top of that, James seems to emphasize the importance of this instruction with the opening words: *but above all*.

Well, he surely has the Lord Jesus’ words in mind:

Matthew 5:33-37 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' (34) But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, (35) or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. (36) And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. (37) Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

And again:

Matthew 23:16-22 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing,

but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' (17) You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? (18) And you say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.' (19) You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred? (20) So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. (21) And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it. (22) And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

Somehow the practice of taking oaths that was common among the Jews, and which had been twisted to allow all kinds of loopholes which allowed a person to break that vow, is set in contrast to persevering faith and prayer that James is talking about.

I am not certain, but let me suggest that verse 12 is describing a way in which men attempt to manipulate the Lord – to their own benefit of course. It is a kind of “magic charm” or “incantation” which supposedly adds weight and probability of fulfillment to our words. “By Jove, By George, By....whatever” people act as if they

can control their destiny. But the Christian is simply to trust the Lord in persevering faith, even in difficult times of suffering, and pray in faith, which is the subject James now turns to –

James 5:13-20 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. (14) 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. (15) And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (16) Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (17) Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. (18) Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (19) My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, (20) let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

We will plan to consider these verses in more detail next time, but for now notice that *prayer* is the subject here:

- Prayer in suffering, in good times, in sickness
- Prayer by the elders of the church
- Prayer in regard to forgiveness of sins

And a promise that the prayer of a righteous person, as evidenced by Elijah, has *great power*.

These closing verses give us a real insight into what the nature and practice of the true church is to be. I think that if anyone asked James “why should I belong to a local church” he may well offer these very words as his answer. *We wait for the Lord, we endure in suffering and trials, we establish our hearts in faith, and we do it with the help of one another.*