

Patience in Persecution.
James 5:7-12

Luke 6:20-38

Romans 12:1-18

Responsive Reading Ephesians 4:1-7

Last week we starting here in chapter 5 were James both puts forth a warning to the Rich oppressors who were persecuting and oppressing the Jewish Christians. He was very blunt with them, telling them of their impending doom, but he did not offer then any instruction or way out. I find it interesting that he did not offer up advice, or opportunity for repentance or reconciliation to these rich rulers.

As we made mention last week, I don't believe that these people that James is writing about here in early in chapter 5 are christian brothers, but rather the Jewish Leaders, and men of power who were the ones oppressing the christian brothers and sisters that James was writing to. With that in mind, because James' letter was written and intended for the Christians in Jerusalem, and those who have fled the oppression and persecution, this was intended for them which is why I think there is not a call to repentance because he was not addressing directly these who were outside the brotherhood of Christ.

So that begs the question, if this was written to Christian brothers and sisters, and not to the rich oppressors who were persecuting them then why does he direct this section of chapter 5 to them, And to those who likely wouldn't even read it. In thinking on this, I came up with 2 possible reasons. First, is the possibility that some who were causing the persecution may very well have been attending the gathering of these believers and joining in their times of worship. I think James would be well aware of this. Earlier in the book, and I think much of James maybe targeted at those who are meeting with the body of believers there, but who do not show a true saving faith.

We see it time and time again through this book when James instructs his readers to be doers of the word and not hearers only, do not seek your own selfish desires, bridle your tongue, do not show favoritism, be humble, seeking wisdom, to be swift to hear, and slow to speak. I think that James focused on all of these things because all of these things were happening in the churches he wrote to, and some of these very same people who were the business owners, or men of status who were oppressing these people were the ones in the assembly guilty of these sinful behaviors that James talks about.

Another reason why I think that in Chapter 5 here, even though James is directing it toward the rich who were the oppressors and persecutors, it would be the brothers and sisters in Christ who would read this and I think James said this as a reminder that these very people who were persecuting them would one day have God's judgment upon them. James's vivid language serves both as an encouragement to his listeners that during this test of faith, to be patient and to wait upon God with whom there is no turning or variation, and who gives every good and perfect gift. And as a warning to them, to the Christian brothers and sisters to not be consumed by such things, for the things of the world fade and it is best to put our sites on things above which are eternal then to seek glory and power, status and riches here on this earth.

So this week we pick back up at verse 7, which flows directly from the first 6 verses. Because all of these things are true, because the riches of the world are corrupt, because the rich persons gold and silver are corroded and is a witness against them, they live in luxury, and feed off of the poor, they

condemn, and they murder and he tells his christian brothers to be patient, and wait for the Lord.

James did not instruct the rich, and the powerful to repent of their ways, to turn and set aside their greed and lust but he uses them as an example to show how we as Christians should act when we are oppressed or persecuted.

This is very applicable today, and I think really needs to be preached in our churches today. We live in a time of oppression, it has not yet come to a point where it has effected our lively hoods, or our safety here in this country but it seems that the hand writing is on the wall. You do not have to look very hard at the society around us to see the rising persecution against anyone who claims Christ. We are seen as bigoted, angry, loud, stupid, simple people and largely it is our own fault because many have not heeded the words here of James to be swift to hear, and slow to speak, and slow to anger.

There was a time when the idea of attending a weekly church service was a good thing, and even those who did not attend, many would agree and would say they should go more often. Now in our society the idea of attending a church services seemed to have become a waste of time, or a nuisance. We see it even in the churches themselves as they try to appeal to draw people in, making their services more entertaining, or using marketing strategies to create programs to attempt to draw people in or to keep them coming. Instead of focusing on the preaching of the word of God, they instead focus on making themselves appealing to the world.

Where I work has been doing this very same type of thing. We seem to have a problem to keep people after they get hired in, largely because of the current job market here. It seems that you can't throw a stone without hitting a company who is hiring, so people are jumping job to job to find the one that they feel suits them. So the response to try to keep these people is to make working at one company more enticing then another. So now we have changed many of our policies biasing toward new employees in an attempt to keep them, but in the process they have angered those who are the backbone, those who are there every day.

In much of the same way our churches have done the same thing. They have become so “seeker friendly” and have focused so much on bringing people in the doors that they have forgot to take care of those who are in the church itself. Teaching of the word is left off for programs and entertainment, and Christians are falling through the cracks in the church because they are not being fed, and those who everything has been turned to cater to eventually become bored and leave for the next best thing.

So now we have churches full of social Christians, people who do not have a faith based in scripture, a faith based upon Christ but who are rather focused on outward morality, and living your best life now. And it seems that it is these have now become the representatives of the Christian faith. It is no surprise then that Christianity comes under the cross hairs of a secular society when what they see are people who are not the humble, patient, loving, kind person who is walking in the spirit, but rather see an angry, bigoted, loud, judgmental person who is forcing his own set of rules and regulations he claims are derived from the bible. In short, the churches who are attaching themselves to these political movements are not doing themselves any favors and really are just inviting persecution upon themselves. It goes back to having a wrong focus. Instead of inviting political speakers and politicians into the pulpits, and instead of running fund raisers for political action committees and special interest they should be preaching the word.

I guess all of this is to say why I think James needs to be shouted from the mountain tops. I think that our churches today are filled with people with an empty faith, people who have fooled themselves just as James has said, people who have deceived themselves, people who are hearers and not doers.

Our society today looks at the church, and from the outside they see backbiting, gossiping, slander, legalism, hypocrisy, arrogance, and pride. Sadly it seems that you could use those words to describe a lot of churches today and I think one of the main reasons that this is so is because pastor's have left off preaching the gospel, and rather seek to grow the church through other means.

We end up with congregations full of people with empty faith, at the very least people who are not taught the gospel and it's effect on the believer. We are told to have our best life now, to just trust in God and he will provide for us all that we desire. Filling stadiums with people who are being taught that God is a cosmic Santa Clause and all we need to do is ask and he will give, and if he doesn't give what you ask it is because you are lacking in your faith.

These pastors do not preach the gospel of the bible, they feed their people with self help psychology dressed up as Christianity filling the stadiums with people looking for a spiritual experience. It is no wonder that what we see coming out of such a thing is sexual immorality, fraud, embezzlement, and a whole variety of scandals. This is what the world sees when they think of the church, when they think of Christianity they see the hypocrisy, the churches full of poor people being told they have not because they ask not, while the pastor has multiple homes worth millions of dollars.

Then we ask, why the persecution, why is Christianity under attack in this country. Sometimes the persecution we get, is the persecution we bring upon ourselves. A good example of this is a few years ago someone that I worked with was hated by everyone on his line. They ended up putting him in a corner by himself inspecting parts. I asked a friend who worked on that line what happened and he told me that this kid was working next to a gay guy on his line, and he told the guy that he hates him, because God hates him because he is gay. Then they mocked him, and put him in his own little corner which he gladly went to because he was "suffering for Christ."

This is not the kind of persecution that James is talking about here, this is self inflicted, purposely setting yourself up to be a martyr. Or we see the person who is complaining about their life, "Why would God allow this to happen to me?" When in reality all that is happening to them is the outcome of their own life decisions. They think themselves holy, but live a worldly life of sin, and when punishment comes for that sin they blame God. In the first chapter of James it says, "Let no one say when they are tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone, But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticing. Sometimes we get the persecution we deserve. This entire book of James tells us how we are live, and what a true Christians life will look like yet we look around and see many who fit the description he uses of those who have a false faith, and we see pastor's who are leading the charge.

It is pretty obvious that Christian values, and ideals are under attack today, and if we claim to be a christian, and hold to christian morality, and world view, you are seen as backwards, bigoted, and foolish. You get lumped in with what is seen by society, the mega churches, led by false preachers, preaching a false gospel, leading a group of false Christians in a life not lead by the spirit. The churches focus it seems in this country has largely become attached to the conservative political movement and I think that this is a big mistake. While each of us individually are free in this, to support, to vote, and

debate as we desire, the mistake is when the church organizations themselves become involved.

The purpose, and reason for the assembly of believers is not for political power and gain, it is to build up and edify the body. If your church is taking the time that should be used to preach Christ, with some political fund raiser, or special speaker then there is a problem, the focus is off and has become more about the conservative political movement than teaching, and growing in grace through our lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes, we get the persecution we deserve.

James here in the verses we are looking at today instructs us how we are to conduct ourselves during oppression and persecution. Oppression and persecution can come from many different places. It can come from co-workers, friends, family members, and people within the church. How we conduct ourselves under persecution and oppression is just as important if not more so than how we conduct ourselves any other time. For under persecution and oppression is when our faith is tested and how we conduct ourselves serves as a witness to Christ in us.

Turning to our text today, after James in the first 6 verses laid out a condemnation for the rich who have been oppressing and persecuting the Jewish Christians, and instructs these Christians that during this time to be patient, and wait for the coming of the Lord. For with the Lords coming will be the judgment of those who oppressed and persecuted them. James does not tell them to react anger for anger, or to retaliate,..in verse 6 he says the righteous does not resist while under persecution, knowing that God is righteous and will judge accordingly.

Just as we read this morning in Luke, do not resist, do not trade anger for anger, and retaliate against your oppressors, but rather love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.

Likewise Paul instructs us in the same way in Romans 12, starting in 17. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord, therefore If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty give him a drink for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Also 1 Peter 2:18. Servants be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only the good and gentle, but also the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

Not resisting, and not retaliating against those who hurt us goes against our very human nature. We want justice, we want vengeance, we want to stand up for our rights! Yet the bible tells us not to resist, not to retaliate. And our basis for this is because of an awareness that God is the ultimate judge. And his judgment is righteous, and final. Vengeance is mine says the Lord, we are to have patience, and wait upon him and not take matters into our own hands.

This is a hard thing for us to do.. to wait upon God because we want things when we want it, and how we want it but James here reminds us and encourages us to wait upon God and gives us 3 examples. The first example is that of a Farmer in verse 7. He says, "see how the farmer waits for the precious

fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.” We are to be patient, waiting for the coming of the Lord just as the Farmer patiently waits for the rain.

2nd James mentions the prophets in verse 10 he says, “Brothers, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. The prophets were mocked, they suffered for God and James says that they are an example to us of being patient in suffering. Waiting upon God to do what he said he would.

3rd James mentions Job in verse 11. He says, “indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord- that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. Job stands as an example of patiently waiting on God through great persecution and in the end God rewarded him greatly.

These examples remind us to place our trust in God, to be steadfast and have patience, and to wait upon him. Verse 8, You also be patient, Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. How do we establish our hearts, how do we stay determined to be patient and not resist as we ought during persecution and oppression? It is by reading God's word, by focusing our hearts and our minds on him. Let us be determined that not matter what circumstance arises in our lives that we will put Christ foremost, he is our rock, our shield, and our defender. Let him who is holy and just, be the one to judge and punish. Let us close today, with this comfort from our Lord Jesus Christ, after he told his disciples the things to come, in Verse 33 of John, he says. “ These things I have spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.