



Session 8 – James 5:7-20

PATIENCE AND PRAYER WHEN SUFFERING

Patience (v.7-12)

The word “then” (= “therefore”) in v.7 implies that James is referring back to the previous paragraph. He is addressing Christians (“brothers”) who are suffering at the hands of the exploitative rich people whom he condemned in v.1-6. His advice to them is

Be patient (v.7-11). NT has two words for patience:

- a word which means ‘patience with people’ – often translated as *long-suffering* – used by James in v.7,8,10.

- a word which means ‘patience with things’ – often translated as *perseverance* or *endurance* – used by James in v.11 (also in 1:3,4,12).

James uses both words but blurs their meanings.

Their patience will be based on the certainty that the return of Jesus – the Lord’s coming – is near. (This does not mean that is necessarily imminent, but that everything needed to prepare for it has been completed: the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the sending of the Holy Spirit. The next big event in God’s calendar will be the return of Jesus.) They can be patient because they can have complete confidence that, at the second coming, all wrongs will be righted – the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be vindicated. In one of his mini-parables, James likens this to a farmer waiting with confidence, even through the driest months, that God will bless the land with rain and that there will be a good harvest.

Stand firm (v.8). Suffering or other difficult circumstances may try to knock us off course. James encourages his readers to stand firm – to hold fast to their faith no matter what life throws at them.

Don't bicker (v.9). When life is hard, it is easy to take out our frustrations on other people. They can be on the receiving end of our grumpiness, and we can be tempted to try and blame them for the things that are causing difficulties. We should seek to live in harmony with our Christian brothers and sisters; they can be a great support to us in difficult times.

Be truthful (v.12). v.12 doesn't quite seem to fit in this context, but James is perhaps suggesting that, when suffering and difficulties come our way, we must still stick to the truth – people must be able to trust us to speak truthfully. If we want to defend ourselves against people who cause us suffering, we must not tell lies about what they have done. (“Truth is the first casualty of war.”)

As he often does, James has examples from OT.

- *The prophets (v.10).* They often suffered because of their work – Jeremiah especially. But they did not let it stop their preaching. The suffering that we experience need not stop us serving and witnessing.

- *Job (v.11).* In the face of the most appalling suffering, both mental and physical, Job questioned God and complained, but he did so within the context of holding steadfastly to his faith. He showed great patience and endurance – hanging on in there whatever his circumstances threw at him. In the end he experienced God's blessing because of God's great compassion and mercy.

Prayer (v.13-20)

A variety of situations for prayer

- Is any one among you *in trouble* (v.13a)?
- Is anyone *happy* (v.13b)?
- Is anyone among you *ill* (v.14a)?
- If they have *sinned* (v.15b).

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions . . .” (Eph 6:18).

A variety of ways of praying

- When in trouble, pray (v.13a) – probably meaning personal prayer, bringing to God our requests for strength to persevere through all our difficulties.

- When happy, as we give God thanks, what better way of praising God than by singing (v.13b).

- When ill, seek the prayer of others: the leaders of the church (v.14b) whose ministry may include anointing with oil (a symbol of God's goodness being brought into the situation), or the whole congregation – "pray for each other" (v.16).

- When sinful, confess your sins (v.16). James includes the possibility which sounds rather uncomfortable to us, that we might confess our sins to each other.

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Eph 6:18).

Three things that never vary

God brings wholeness. James speaks of both healing and forgiveness. When Jesus healed a paralysed man (Mark 2:1-12), he both forgave him his sins and brought physical healing. NB James only says, "If the person has sinned . . ." and Jesus says that there is not always a connection between sin and physical illness (John 9:1-3). The healing – the wholeness – that Jesus brings involves every aspect of the person.

It is all to do with faith. "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well" (v.15). "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (v.16). In another illustration from OT, Elijah was a great example of this (v.17f). Faith – faith that God has the power to heal and that his will is perfect – is an absolutely vital aspect of our praying for healing. But that does not mean that, if we can muster up enough faith, we can make God heal; our prayers will be answered, but not necessarily in the way we hoped. Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh (2Cor 12:7-10): God did not take his affliction away, but he answered his prayer in a different way by giving him the strength to persevere.

It is God who does the healing. When someone is anointed with oil, it is done *in the name of the Lord* (v.14). "The Lord will raise them up" (v.15). However the healing ministry is exercised, it is not the person praying but God who does the healing.

For homegroups

- What sort of people or situations cause you to be impatient? How can you become more patient with them?
- Read Ps 37:1-17, 34-end. What does the psalmist say to those who are experiencing suffering at the hands of others?
- When we are tempted to grumble about someone, how can we resist the temptation?
- In what circumstances are you most likely to pray?
In what circumstances are you most likely to fail to pray?
- Within the life of the church, prayer for healing happens in a variety of ways – eg in a homegroup; informally between friends; a minister visiting the sick; prayer by a minister or other members of the church, maybe including the laying on of hands, during or after Sunday worship.
If you were sick, what form of ministry would you most welcome?
- How many accounts can you think of from OT and NT of prayers that were answered? (Perhaps limit the size of this task by excluding Jesus' miracles.)
- Can you tell of occasions when prayers for healing have been answered?
- Can you tell of occasions when prayers for healing were, as far as you could see, unanswered? Were you able to make sense of what happened, or were you left bewildered by the experience?
- What can we learn from 2Cor 12:7-10, where healing wasn't granted in the way Paul prayed for it?
- A not-yet-Christian friend asks you what you mean by "wholeness." How would you answer?