

## James 5:10-12 'Remember The Prophets, Job, and Your Word!'

Last time in James we looked at chapter 5:7-9 in a sermon I called 'Stand Firm Because The Lord Is At Hand'. After addressing those non-Christian oppressors, (be that Jew or gentile) James returns to his beloved sheep of the scattered churches of Jerusalem. As he is about to bring this letter to a close, he returns to how he began, by encouraging his persecuted brethren to "*Makrothumesate*" be long suffering in the face of persecution. In chapter 1:3, he spoke of "*hupomones*": endurance, remaining even though others flee.

Well in v7 of chapter 5, it is "be patient," "*Makrothumesate*": be long suffering in the face of persecution at the hands of those previous people, and others like them, because the prize is eternally worth it! Using the example of the diligent farmer who was long suffering towards his crop. The fruit of the earth, in the old translation. The farmer toils away faithfully, with the expectation that God will bless his labours, sending the "early rains and the latter rains." The "early rains" are those seed sowing life giving rains, while the latter ones strengthen the crop, making it lush and ready for harvest.

So too the Christian. The seed is sown and watered by the Holy Spirit through the life giving gospel. And through those "latter rains" by sitting under the preaching, the teaching and the study of the Word of God throughout our lives! Yes the believer is brought to maturity, being made ready to be taken up into glory. So we are to be "long suffering" for Christ and our faith in Him. Because the Christian life is not a sprint it's a marathon, and only "he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

We ought to be "long suffering" times 3, and why? V8: "Because the Lord's coming is near." Matthew 10:22: "All men will hate you because of me". V24:12-13 "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved." "Stands firm," "*steruxate*" establish our hearts. Be immovable, deeply rooted, "Because the coming of the Lord is at hand." V9: "Don't murmur against each other." Don't whinge and complain against one another with petty jealousies and envy. That gives Satan a foothold among us. Don't bring the enemy inside, there is already enough of a battle taking place. Yes "remain," "be longsuffering" under trial and persecution "Because the coming of the Lord is at hand!"

We pick it up in v10-12 of chapter 5: 'Remember The Prophets, Job, and Your Word!' After having used the word "long suffering" three times already, (while giving us the example of the diligent farmer in verses 7-8) such is the imperative, for those suffering brethren of the scattered Jerusalem church to understand, that that is the lot of the Christian in this life at the hands of the world. He gives them yet another example of this "long suffering" (with an even more powerful call to arms as it were) in the lives of the prophets: "Brothers, as an example of long suffering, (in the original it's suffering ill) yes in the face of suffering," take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord."

Now brothers and sisters, let's understand how important this was for them and also for us to understand. James puts paid to the notion that the Christian life is the easy way. Yes, it is the only way to God and heaven's glories, but it is not the easy way. Before his own martyrdom in Acts Chapter 7, Stephen laid the responsibility for the persecution and death of the prophets down squarely at the feet of his soon to be murderers and the murderous ancestors which they so often boasted of. Responsible for the very deaths and persecutions of those heaven sent mouth pieces of God! Matt 7:51-54: "You stiff necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like

your fathers! You always resist the Holy Spirit. Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him, you have received the Law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it". When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him."

You see, James is telling his brethren, and us also, (as Tom rightly pointed out some weeks ago at Bible study) nothing's changed! People in power wielding their authority attacking Christ's people in their rebellion against God. And this continues to happen around the world today. Look up Richard Wurmbrand on YouTube and you will be shocked at the evil attack against God through His people. Here in Australia we have really only been experiencing what are the beginnings of Satan's enmity. While in many places around the world our brethren are being murdered for their faith in Christ. 360 million Christians each year experience what is referred to as high level persecution. Around 100,000 are put to death for their allegiance to Jesus.

So this example by James in the shape of the prophets, is not to be sneezed at! Isaiah was sawn in two. Jeremiah was stoned to death. Ezekiel was also murdered that way. John the Baptist beheaded, Peter crucified upside down and Stephen, the first recorded martyr, stoned to death! Although the Jews didn't kill them all, they certainly persecuted and pursued every single one. And of course murdered the very Son of God Himself! Yes the people of God, persecuting and murdering those Holy Spirit sent mouthpieces of God. Those men who literally spoke from God. What He had directed them to say to His people.

I want you to think about that friends. God spoke through His Holy Spirit sent heralds what he wanted them to say and as we Stephen, the hearers of His Truth, sought to put to death those who spoke it! Just as Stephen said: "They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him." So James' exhortation to "long suffering," to "long suffering," to "long suffering" and "to long suffering," was not merely some kind of empty motivational speech for them, to live their best life now, which so many preach today, no. He hangs his words brethren, on the blood of the Saints!

As I mentioned last time, the Christian life is not a sprint, it's a marathon. And like those marathon runners who ran while fixing their sights firmly upon the prize, because it was winner take-all in those races. And they trained with discipline for many months, prior to the event. Well we too, must set our sights upon the heavenly prize! And when each trial of life that God sends to us comes, be they physical or spiritual battles, (and actually in truth they're all spiritual battles to some degree) when these things come we call upon our Saviour to strengthen us. While remembering that Isaiah 49:16: "Jesus has engraved us on the palm of his hands", and Psalm 73:23: "You hold me by my right hand."

Friends again, James really does put paid to that notion of come to Jesus and all will be a breeze. Life will be easy, and you will even be healthy wealthy and wise. Jesus warned His disciples about following Him. That what lay ahead of Him was the Cross, and it would be the same for anyone who followed. And in 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul wrote "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." So James wants us to consider, that if those who were in such a privileged position as being the very mouthpieces of God experienced such trials. What right did his hearers, (and you and I also) have to expect anything less from those who are the enemies of our King? And yet when he uses the example of the prophets, he doesn't only do so as a warning, but also as an encouragement! Jesus' Own Words in Matthew 5:11-12, in His summing up of the beatitudes: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven. For in the same way they

persecuted the prophets who were before you.” And what is both Jesus and James point? Well simply this: that if we emulate them, we go in good company!

In Hebrews 11:32-40: “And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawn in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated, the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” Yes, as you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.”

Yet again we have that word “*hupomones*.” Those who have remained, those who have stayed the course through trial are “considered blessed” by those of us who learn of them. In Romans 8:16-18 Paul puts it this way: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs, Co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us!” We come now to James third example of this “remaining,” this “perseverance” in the things of God's Kingdom in the face of suffering. 11b: “You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.” John Calvin writes: ‘A person's afflictions, ought ever to be estimated by their end.’

Friends when we read the book of Job, one thing can be easily overlooked or forgotten until we get to the very end. Throughout it all, God was at work! As Blanchard remarks: ‘If we read the book of Job and all of his many sufferings, trials and extraordinary losses, without considering God's overriding Hand and Sovereign plan for Job's life, through all of those things. It can soon turn simply into a book of misery.’ But as within each of our lives, these trials, (be they physical, relational, emotional, psychological, or spiritual) all of these things have a purpose! We might not discover what those purposes are while we are in the midst of those trials, we might never find out why, this side of heaven. But one thing we can absolutely be sure of. God is at work within them to bring us closer to Himself, as He is carrying us into glory! Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.” Yes “You have heard of Job's perseverance, (his remaining true to his faith in God through the greatest of trials) and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.”

Friends do you understand what James is saying here? It's as I mentioned earlier, that throughout all of Job's trials, God had not abandoned His child. And although as we know, all things happen so that God brings glory to Himself, woven within those things here, His Plan was to bring blessing and honour upon Job. As God draws Job closer to Himself. That is always God's ultimate purpose in all of our difficulties brothers and sisters. And through those trials, God strengthens our reliance upon Himself. As he carries us through them all and ultimately into Glory! King David wrote in Psalm 23:3-5: “He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yeh though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I'll fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou annointeth my head with oil my cup overflows.”

Friends if we would seek to give glory to God in this world of evil, those paths for the sake of the Name of our Saviour, will bring with them what James is seeking to encourage his sheep to stand firm throughout. Troubles and strife as we stand for His Name. But David's "cup overflows" with God's blessing through it all! In his words we see the victory of the returning hero as he is lauded and heralded, while being escorted into the presence of his father. Surrounded by neighbours and town folk, the cup of triumph is placed into his hand. The father's own cup. And the finest wine poured into it until it flows out onto the ground. Yes it's the picture of victory over all the battles of this life for the believer.

But the Psalm looks way beyond this life. Brethren as we know for Job, what God finally brought about was that he not only restored, but that he actually doubled all of Job's tremendous wealth. "14,000 sheep. 6000 camels and 1000 yoke of oxen." And he would again have "three daughters and seven sons." Now does this then mean, (as some would have us believe, that we can expect, and even claim) such restitution of things when we are hard done by in this life? Well, no. It certainly will happen if it is God's plan and purpose for us. But that's not the message of the book. Ask the Vinnecomb family. The Wurmbands, and countless others throughout the millennia! No it is God's sustaining grace throughout all of those trials.

Look at what James writes in 11c: "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." Beloved, that is what we learn from the book of Job. No God hadn't abandoned His child. Yes He was allowing Job to be tested through the most unimaginable means. But His Hand was upon Job every step of the way. Because God is merciful! And when He had finally carried Job through all of those things, his eyes could finally see clearly. Job 42:1-6: "Then Job replied to the Lord, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, "Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?" Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, "Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me." My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Yes, "My ears had heard of you. But now my eyes have seen you." You see, he'd had a light bulb moment. *O Lord you have not been harsh or indifferent to my suffering, indeed O Lord you are merciful!* Yes V11c: "The Lord is full of compassion and mercy." He has a plan and purpose for all of our hardships whatever they may be. Illness, financial struggles, emotional trials, spiritual persecution. As David could also write in Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the House of the Lord forever."

Beloved that is the goal of all of our struggles in this life, whatever they may be. To draw us closer to our heavenly Father and our dependence upon Him. In preparation for when He carries us into the glory of His internal presence. Amen!

V12: "Above all, my brothers, do not swear, not by heaven or by earth, or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your "No" no, or you will be condemned." Now friends, the question could rightly be asked, Why at this point in his letter does James suddenly speak of oaths and swearing by things? And perhaps like me before seeking the wisdom of the Commentators, you also had no idea. I couldn't see a link with what comes before, and indeed the only conclusion that I could come to, was that he was returning yet again to one of his main themes: the dangers of having an unbridled tongue. And perhaps saving the most important one so to speak, that danger in relation of having a loose tongue towards God, for last. But what the Commentators do explain, is that James is simply dealing with an important issue which was currently plaguing the church. And it was in essence, the breaking of the third commandment. Exodus 20:7: "You shall not misuse the Name of the Lord your God. For the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his Name." And as we look at this we

need to understand that the Name of God was held in such reverence and fear by the Jews, that His Name Yahweh, was rarely if ever heard among them. Uttered only by the high priest when offering that once a year sacrifice for the atonement of the collective sin of the nation, some say. And there have been those who have used this verse down through the ages to suggest that Christians must never take an oath about anything. Even when giving evidence in court.

But that is not what James is saying here, no! He's dealing with having a familiar and contemptuous attitude towards using the Name of God. Which is basically the opposite to the third Commandment. And the Commentators also suggest that it is the easiest sin to fall into, and the hardest to get out of! Brothers and sisters, I've mentioned before that the blasphemy against the Name of our God, is basically a national sport. Now I speak respectfully here Lord, it is '*Christ*' *this*, and '*Christ*' *that*, and with every profanity known to man adjoined to our Saviour's Name. These things are acceptable here in Australia as basically part of our common speech, and no one even bats an eye. And yet for the person for whom Jesus died, we should feel as though we have been personally assaulted and our wounded within our soul. Beloved it should offend us, and if it doesn't, it is that unbeknownst to us we have become accepting to those assaults upon our Saviour's Name.

And what's interesting, is that James is basically addressing what has happened in Australia in regard to our courts and swearing upon the Word of God, the Bible! In former times as we know, when someone was about to give evidence they were asked the question: 'Do you swear upon The Bible, that the evidence which you are about to give is the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me God?' And now they're basically given the option, that if there is a Bible in a court at all. And this was having the same effect you see. What the Jews were doing with those frivolous oaths, was seeking to negate their accountability to God, By simply not mentioning His Name! They might swear by the temple, or by the altar, or by the sacrifice which is on the altar. Or some part of God's Own creation. And yet in doing so, what they were actually saying, was that those so-called sworn oaths were not binding. So their words, and their word, were as empty and meaningless as those oaths which they spoke. And notice that he begins: "Above all," not above everything that he has previously written, but in relation to this particular issue, of the frivolous use of oaths and misuses of God's Name! So if they swore by any of those other things, to whom did they point anyway? Who is the Creator of them all? Well of course it is God. So to use those things in that manner, was none other than blasphemy against God! "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his Name."

So to bring these things to a close today we must remember the prophets, for although in a tremendous position of privilege, that did not keep them out of harm's way. If anything that put them in the firing line. If we would truly stand for Jesus we shouldn't expect anything less at the hands of this anti-Christ world. We remember Job, because like ourselves, he didn't know why he was going through those things, and indeed he never got an answer. But what he did learn was that God had not abandoned him. God was not indifferent to his sufferings and God had carried him through them all.

We also remember the importance of letting our 'yes' be 'yes' and our 'no' 'no', because unlike this deceitful world in which we live, truth matters to God. Our words and our word are our bond and a reflection of who we are in Christ. So we should never need to frivolously swear by anything to ratify our truth because we should always speak the truth. Yeas we remember the prophets, we remember Job, and we remember our word.

Let's pray.