

James 1:12-18, 5:7-20

Trial and temptation

Chapter 1:

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Chapter 5:

⁷ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. ⁹ Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. ¹² Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned. ¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. ¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Patterns to notice:

Chapter 1:

Life – as a result of perseverance

Death – as a result of giving in to temptation

New life – result of birth through ‘the word of truth’

Chapter 5:

Exhortation

Example/illustration

Why?

Wait patiently until the Lord’s coming

Positive example of the farmer

Be patient; strengthen your heart.

Reason for patience: the Lord is near

Do not grumble against each other

Do not grumble because the judge is near

Positive example of the prophets:

suffering and patience

Blessed are those who endure

Positive example of Job

‘what the Lord finally brought about’ –
the reward for Job’s patient endurance

The Lord is merciful and compassionate

Do not swear/Let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no

Otherwise you will be condemned

(Final exhortations)

Those who are in trouble should pray

Those who are happy should sing songs of praise

Those who are sick should call the elders of the church to pray for and anoint them

Prayer offered in faith will make the sick
person well; God will raise them up

If they have sinned, they will be forgiven

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other

So that you may be healed

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective

Positive example of Elijah

Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it didn't

Elijah prayed that it would rain and it did

Bring back those who are wandering from the truth

Save them

Notice that all of the exhortations relate to how we use our words (recall the emphasis on this in chapter 3 also):

- No grumbling
- Prophets 'spoke in the name of the Lord'
- No swearing/integrity in what we say
- Prayer as a response to suffering
- Singing songs of praise as a response to cheerfulness
- Prayer of the elders for those who are sick
- Even 5:19-20 relates to words: 'if one of you should wander from the truth'. This recalls 1:18, new birth through the 'word of truth'

Why do you think James put such an emphasis on words? He could have given any number of other applications for the points he was making, so why did he focus on speech?

Other questions to ponder:

- In both chapters, James details right and wrong ways to deal with suffering and waiting. What are they?
- Do you find it easy or hard to be patient?
- Are you waiting for the Lord's coming?
 - Why/why not?
 - Note: there are pastoral concerns related to this issue. Some people may not be looking forward to Jesus' return because they have friends and family who don't know Jesus. For those people, Jesus' return is terrifying. You may need to be sensitive to this if your group discusses it.

- I think in our context, Jesus' return is not something they have considered much, or live their lives in light of. It would be worth discussing whether people agree with this assessment, and why you think that is.
 - What does it look like to wait with patience?
 - It makes sense to consider the examples that James has given here first. What is it that we can learn from farmers and the prophets?
 - Farmers cannot control when the crops come up. They plant the seeds, and then they must wait for the growth. They know from the changes in the seasons, that the rain that will grow their crops is coming soon. Similarly for us, we cannot control when Jesus comes back, but we can tell from the 'seasons' (the signs that Jesus indicated) that he *will* come.
 - Prophets: the prophets were rejected and opposed for speaking God's words to His people. Yet they were faithful to God and his message. Their example is relevant to James' original audience and to us if we are being opposed for our faith
 - See also Hebrews 11 for examples of prophets
 - It would be good to discuss current examples too. What makes someone who is waiting for Jesus' return with patience *different from someone who isn't* (waiting, or waiting patiently)?
 - Would your attitude towards sin change? Like someone who knows they are dying, would you want to get your affairs in order?
 - Would your attitude towards money and possessions change? Would you become more generous?
 - What does it look like to wait without patience?
 - Perhaps you would give up on God or living His way
 - Perhaps people who expect that God would have fixed everything by now, that the world and the church would be better (or that they personally would be better), are an example of those who are not patiently waiting; they are expecting everything *now*.
 - Grumbling is probably an example of impatience too.
- Do you grumble about other Christians?
 - About what sorts of things?
 - What is wrong with grumbling?
 - For a positive example of *not* grumbling, see Acts 5:40-42 or 16:22-25
- What does James mean when he talks about not swearing?
 - It's not using four-letter words! He's talking about integrity in the commitments that we make.
 - This is a bit of a challenge for our generation. We are the 'maybe' generation, or the 'yes' on facebook, 'no' in real life generation. Actually committing to the things we say is loving and distinctive.
- What will you do to wait patiently for Jesus? How will you help the people in your group to do so?

You are unlikely to have a lot of time to discuss the rest of the passage, which is unfortunate because it is often misunderstood!

What might be most helpful is to read through the passage, and to use it to shape your prayers for the evening. Those who are happy should praise God (or you could start with some singing). Those who are sick should tell the group (if they are happy to do so) and the leaders of the group should pray for them (I think that would equate to the prayers of elders in this context), and you should encourage people to consider anyone who might be straying (I would suggest they do this privately, rather than announcing it to the group and possibly slandering someone!), and to pray for them quietly.