

The World According to Jim
“Patiently Enduring Downward Mobility”
James 5:7-11

Introduction

- I want to make a few clarifying remarks about last Sunday’s message. I realize last Sunday’s message was thought provoking. It was meant to be. I hope you wrestled and struggled and even fought with God about what James says. One of the beautiful things about James is he says it like it is. He’s very much like Jesus in that respect. Things are black and white. Cut and dried.
- However, some of you may have walked away with the impression that we all have to be poor. God expects the follower of Christ to be poor, black and white. That’s not what I was saying at all. You misheard me. The problem is not that we have money. God has nothing against saving and investing and making as much money as you can. Deuteronomy 8:18 — *Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.* The problem is that we misuse wealth. We hoard it. God, the creator of wealth, never intended for it to be hoarded. We spend it on ourselves. Wealth is meant to be given away, not kept. The cut and dried, black and white part is not rich or poor. It’s generous or not generous. You either misuse wealth by hoarding it and spending it on yourself, and thereby endanger your soul, or you are lavishly generous. God expects the latter. Are we clear? Having money is okay. It’s what you do with it that matters. To that end, live simply. Don’t live extravagantly. Don’t fall into the trap of living luxuriously. And be extravagantly generous.
- See, we forget that God already owns everything. Whatever dollars you have in the account, whatever you have stored up in your 401k, God owns it. All that money you lost this past week wasn’t even yours. Psalms 24:1 — *The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* God says in Leviticus 25:23 *the land is mine...Haggai 2:8. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty.* It’s all his. God calls us to be extravagantly generous with what he owns and has just loaned to us.
- Here’s the deal. The net result of our extravagant generosity is that we may end up not having much. We may end up having less than our neighbors. That’s the challenging part. That’s the part that is hard to hear because it is so different than the way our culture has taught us to live—grab as much as you can. The call to Gospel Poverty is a call to generosity knowing that God will provide and take care of our needs. It is a call to reject the rampant materialism and consumerism of our culture. It is a call to live simply and care for the poor and needy. It may mean some downward mobility. But it is not a call to be poor for poor sake, as if somehow poverty is next to godliness.

Transition

In the World According to Jim the key to downward mobility is perspective. That’s what James 5:7-11 is about. If you keep asking how am I going to do this? How do I become less consumed by stuff and more generous, more willing to be downwardly mobile? [Verses 7-11](#) has the answer. [[Slide #2](#)]

Proposition

- **Patient endurance is necessary for embracing downward mobility**
- Let me say something briefly about patience and endurance, which I've combined into one quality, patient endurance. Patience is the theme of this section. Four times James uses it. Look. Twice in verse 7. Once in verse 8 and once in verse 10. Endurance is spoken of in a roundabout way in verse 8 when James says *stand firm* and then in verse 11 when the word *perseverance* is used. Patience and endurance put together equals patient endurance. This quality is essential for embracing downward mobility.
- Most of us, when we think of patience, we think of something like this. [Slide #3] Two ladies walking out of a church service. The one says, "That was a great sermon on patience." The other responds, "Yeah, but he went five minutes too long." We think of patience strictly as a time issue. Waiting in the checkout line. The patient fisherman. Patience, to us, is having to wait five minutes for something.
- In the World According to Jim patience is so much more than just time, waiting. It describes "the attitude which can endure delay and bear suffering and never give in."¹ It's enduring, most times in the context of suffering or hardship, and not giving up in the middle of that hardship.
- Look at the text. When James says *be patient*, and in verses 7 and 8 *be patient* is a command, he is telling his readers to wait out the hardship of poverty and persecution at the hand of wealthy landowners. How? By hoping.

Transition

In order for us to embrace downward mobility, not just as an idea, but as a way of life, for the sake of the Gospel, we need the right perspective. We'll never properly use the wealth God entrusts to us without patient endurance. How does patient endurance come about? Look at James 5:7-11. [Slide #4] I want you to notice...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two hopes contributing to patient endurance and this move toward downward mobility**
- It comes about by hope. The first hope, from verses 7-9, is of Christ's soon return. And from verses 10-11, the hope infused by the example of others. Two hopes. Let me ask you a question. What does it mean to hope? Hoping is not wishing something happens. Hoping and wishing aren't the same.
- To explain hope, author [Henri Nouwen](#) tells a parable. He imagines twins—a brother and a sister—talking to each other in their mother's womb: The sister said to the brother, "I believe there is life after birth." Her brother protested vehemently, "No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us."
- The little girl insisted, "There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move." Still, she could not convince her twin brother. After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, "I have something else to say, and I'm afraid you won't believe that, either, but I think there is a mother."

¹ Reinecker, p. 740.

- Her brother became furious. "A mother!" he shouted. "What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all. We have all we need, so let's be content."
- The sister was quite overwhelmed by her brother's response and for a while didn't dare say anything more. But she couldn't let go of her thoughts, and since she had only her twin brother to speak to, she finally said, "Don't you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They're quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful."
- "Yes," he answered. "What's special about that?" "Well," the sister said, "I think that these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face-to-face. Don't you think that's exciting?" The brother didn't answer. He was fed up with the foolish talk of his sister and felt that the best thing would be simply to ignore her so that she would leave him alone.²
- The longing, confident expectation for a better world. That's hope. James says hope is the means by which patient endurance comes about. Without hope it will be impossible for any of us to develop a worldview where Gospel Poverty and downward mobility might have a flicker of a chance.

Transition

Look at [verses 7-9](#). Listen. *Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is 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 each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! [Slide #5] What is needed for patient endurance? **The hope of Christ's soon return.**

Main Points

- James uses the life of a farmer to illustrate what it means to hope showing how that hope breeds patient endurance. He says be patient like the farmer who waits for the autumn and spring rains. As [Peter Davids](#) puts it, "The picture is that of a small farmer in Palestine...The small farmer plants his carefully saved seed and hopes for a harvest, living on short rations and suffering hunger during the last weeks [of waiting]. The whole livelihood, indeed the life itself, of the family depends on a good harvest: the loss of the farm, semistarvation or death [may] result from a bad year. So the farmer waits for an expected future event—[rain]. He must exercise patience no matter how hungry he is...James's point is not the length of time one must wait, but whether one will endure the period of waiting."³ Just as the farmer hopes for rain causes him to wait, James says the Christian's hope of Christ's soon return enables her to wait out the adversity caused by downward mobility, by being extravagantly generous, by living as simply as possible. Hope leads to patient endurance.
- When I say Christ's return, what comes to mind? Complicated theology. Technical jargon. Words like pre-millennial. Amillennial. Post-Millennial. Pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib. We make Christ's return too complicated. Like this word problem.

² Henri Nouwen, *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), pp. 19-20.

³ Davids, p. 184-5.

- [Slide #6] If a dog and a rabbit each travel on land the speed of light divided by the number of hairs on their respective bodies, but the dog sheds 23% of its fur during shedding season whereas the rabbit loses only 19%, yet the rabbit normally has only .394 times the number of hairs of the dog, and the dog swims twice as fast as the rabbit unless the water is below 40° Fahrenheit, in which case the dog travels 10MPH slower for every degree under 40, and they begin a race on April 3 from Omaha to Tokyo following the Great Circle Route, who would win?
- You know what? It’s not all that complicated. Christ is returning. [Slide #7] And that hope is meant to affect how we live now. The problem is most of us just don’t think about Christ’s return. It has no impact on our day to day lives.
- What James seems to say in verses 7-9 is that there is a direct correlation between our hope for Christ’s soon return and our ability to patiently wait. Stuff, things, money, wealth are absolutely toxic to following Christ. We’re addicted to them. You know what? Retail therapy isn’t a temptation when you’re actively hoping for Christ’s return. You’re less tempted to heap up stuff for yourself, less tempted to spend on yourself, less tempted to indulge when you know Christ is returning soon. The time is short. You’re more likely to say, “because he’s returning soon, because my hope is in that, I can hold off on that purchase. I can do without that. I can sacrifice here. I can sacrificially give. I can patiently endure not having a lot of stuff because he’s coming back. I can wait it out.”
- *The Judge is standing at the door*, verse 9. His return is soon. Wait it out. The command to be patient, the command to *stand firm* as James says in verse 8 is based on the nearness of the Lords coming.⁴ **The hope of Christ’s soon return** breeds patient endurance. And patient endurance is necessary if we are going to wean ourselves off wealth.

Transition

[Slide #8] The **second hope** we have comes from **the example of others**. Verses 10-11. Look and listen. *Brothers, 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 consider 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.* The example of others who have patiently endured infuses us with hope. We see how others live, how others have lived, how they have sacrificed and we start to say “we can do this too.”

- James cites two examples in verses 10-11, the example of the prophets and the example of Job, both for the purpose of instilling hope. If you are saying to yourself “I can’t do this. I can’t sacrifice my standard of living, my way of life, my creature comforts.” James says yes you can. Others have gone before you who were given the choice to sacrifice for the sake of obedience and chose sacrifice. They did it and so can you.
- *The prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord*. They’re an example. And it was their obedience, their speaking, which led to their suffering. Jeremiah comes to mind. For speaking God’s words he was put in the stocks, thrown into prison, lowered into a cistern. Jeremiah and the other prophets obediently persevered. Let their example give you hope.

⁴ Moo, *James*, Pillar Commentary.

- Job too. *You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.* Job was tested persevered through the test. He’s an example. Let Job’s example give you hope.
- Again, the context of this section James’s audience is patient endurance in the midst of persecution and suffering at the hands of wealthy landowners. Rich people were misusing their wealth and oppressing Christians, James 5:1-6. Verses 7-11 is an extension of what James started in verses 1-6. The application for us is this. We are wealthy. No ifs, ands, or buts. Whereas James’s audience suffered involuntarily at the hands of the rich, this passage will find more and more relevance for us as we voluntarily choose to reject materialism and consumerism in order to be extravagantly generous. We may find ourselves needing patient endurance, needing the hope of Christ’s return, needing the example of others as we sacrifice more and embrace downward mobility.
- The issue for us as we think about embracing Gospel Poverty and downward mobility is this. Is it the Lord’s will? Is this a matter of obedience? I would say yes. The way of the cross, which every follower of Christ is asked to take, is by definition, the way of self-sacrifice. It is a matter of your obedience. Are we being disobedient by living lives of unchecked consumption? Are we being disobedient by giving in to self-indulgent luxury? Are we being disobedient by failing to be extravagantly generous? Yes. If we’re going to embrace downward mobility it’s going to be hard. Maybe the hardest thing you’ve ever done. Will you need patient endurance? Yes. Will you need hope more than ever before? Yes. Will Christ’s soon return take on new meaning? I guarantee you. Will you search out the example of others for encouragement? Without a doubt.

Conclusion

- What God is asking us to do in response to what James says here about wealth and money and embracing downward mobility is to do what Moses did. Hebrews 11:25 *He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.* Downward mobility is a conscious choice we are going to have to make in order to be obedient. If you want to be Jesus’ disciple, then you have to be willing to say good-bye to possessions, material things, stuff.⁵ Luke 14:33 *In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.* Self-sacrifice is never easy. But you know what?
- We have a merciful and compassionate God. **Verse 11.** *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.* Amen? The more you give up, the more you sacrifice, the more you will see compassionate mercy of a God who cares. The text actually says he is greatly compassionate. “God is not vicious; he does not love watching people suffer.”⁶ *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.* He will take care of you.
- It gets back to trust. Do you trust him? Do you trust God to be the kind of God who can sustain and support you as you give up more and more so that the Gospel and his glory might grow and grow? He is completely trustworthy. *O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.*⁷

⁵ Fitzmyer.

⁶ Davids, p. 188.

⁷ 2 Samuel 7:28